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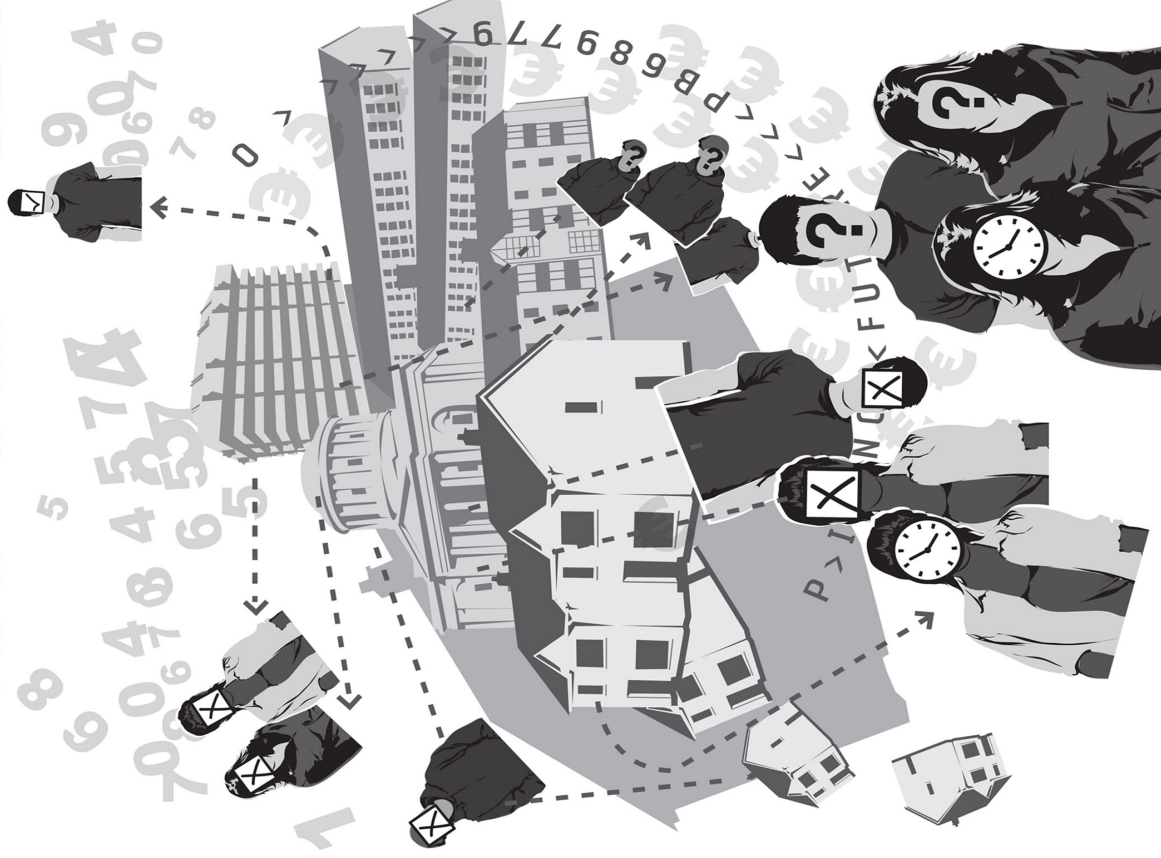
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**The Irish
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The Irish Anarchist Review

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**Crisis of consciousness:
Re-Working class**

welcome to/

Welcome to the sixth instalment of the Irish Anarchist Review, produced by the Workers Solidarity Movement. In this magazine we look to explore ideas about the world around us, how these ideas inform practice and how the intersection of the two leads to new theory, beginning the process afresh. We believe that ideas can only be tested in the laboratory of real life struggle and that this magazine can be a forum for activists who are part of the daily struggle that is going on right now. We hope that the articles here can stimulate discussion and debate and perhaps even motivate some of our readers to respond with articles of their own.

Since the last issue of the IAR, members of the WSM attended the International Anarchist Gathering at St. Imier. The event served two purposes; to commemorate the founding of the Anarchist International one hundred and forty years ago and to allow activists from the current movement the world over to meet and discuss their experience in struggle. There were anarchists of many persuasions in attendance and as the week went on it became clear that for some, class is a contentious issue. For many of us on the left the terms “class”, “working class” and “ruling class” are part of a vocabulary we rarely question, but with the advent of the global occupy movement and the emergence of a whole new layer of activists, many prefer to focus on inequality and the language of “the 99%”.

In Paul Bowman’s article ‘Rethinking Class: From Recomposition to Counter-Power’, he poses the question “Is class still a useful idea?” or “should we instead just dispense with it and go with the raw econometrics of inequality?” He draws a line between revolutionary class analysis and universalist utopianism and goes on to explore the history of different ideas of class and the elusive revolutionary subject. After exploring the intersecting lines of class and identity, he poses the challenge that we as libertarians face as we strive to create “cultural and organisational forms of class power [that] do not unconsciously recreate the... hierarchies of identity and exclusion” that are the hallmark of the present society.

In ‘Not Waving but Drowning: Precarity and the Working Class’, Mark Hoskins takes a critical look at the idea put forward by some academics and even parts of the anti-capitalist movement that the “precariat” is the revolutionary subject of our epoch. After examining the subjective conditions of the precarious subject today and comparing its objective conditions to those of the working class of the last century, he goes on to explore how these conditions relate to our end goal, a communist society and what lessons that can teach us in our attempt to get there.

We need look no further than the north of this island for proof that the politics of identity complicates the project of class re-composition. Guest writer Liam O’Rourke casts his eye over the neo-liberal project of regeneration in the six counties. He notes that the elite sections of both communities have no problem uniting around what he describes as the “shared non-sectarian identity of the consumer” which reduces shared space to “commercial shared space”. Yet the fact that working class people have seen little of the promised “peace dividend” has not lead to heightened class consciousness so much as it has to increased sectarian division.

The occupy movement may have come into our lives just over a year ago with a bang but it went out months later with a whimper. Cathal Larkin uses the benefit of hindsight to look at the phenomenon as it manifested itself on these shores and what anarchists could have done to make it work better. The difficulties as Cathal argues did not lie in making arguments for democracy has been the case in so many other campaigns but in that the occupiers “didn’t see this conception extending to the realm of economic production” and in developing the 99%/1% analysis into a deeper class analysis. Recognising problems with current modes of consciousness raising, he utilises Paulo Freire’s pedagogical framework in an attempt to subject “our own political strategies, methodologies and theories to critical scrutiny”.

There is an ongoing debate within left wing and feminist circles in general and in the WSM in particular on how we see sex work. In two related articles, Leticia Ortega and T.J. give the case for decriminalisation. In “Sex and Sex Work from an anarcho-feminist perspective”, Leticia looks at the theoretical background to the debate between those who argue for decriminalisation and

Editorial Committee

Paul Bowman, Mark Hoskins, Liam Hough & Cathal Larkin.
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those who “see sex work (or even sex in general) as violence against women”. She argues that because sex is commodified, sex workers should be treated in the same way as others who engage in exploitative labour. “In Turn off the Red Light – Should We Advocate It?”, T.J., explores the problems faced by sex workers in gaining recognition by those who normally fight for workers rights and outlines how criminalisation of demand has created new problems in countries where that has been introduced.

In the second part of an article that appeared in issue five of the IAR, Fin Dwyer looks at the latter years of Ireland’s first post independence government, which having successfully suppressed political opposition and the workers’ movement, went on to “attack women and enforce their moral and ethical values on wider society”. From the clearing of prostitutes from the Monto and the filling of the Magdalene laundries to the institutionalisation of child abuse, he describes how the state’s close association with the Catholic Church played a decisive role in forming attitudes to women and sex that have had a devastating effect on Irish society that can still be felt today.

In our reviews section Liam Hough looks at *Chavs: The Demonisation of the Working Class* by Owen Jones, Dermot Sreenan tackles *Marx’s Economics for Anarchists* by Wayne Price while Kevin Doyle tells us about *Mentioning the War: Essays and Review* by left wing poet, Kevin Higgins.

In a time when much of the left is pre-occupied with building “left unity”, we hope the ideas expressed here can help open up a debate on how we approach building class unity. We want those who read the magazine to develop on them and perhaps respond with ideas of their own.

Words: Mark Hoskins

about the wsm/

The Workers Solidarity Movement was founded in Dublin, Ireland in 1984 following discussions by a number of local anarchist groups on the need for a national anarchist organisation. At that time with unemployment and inequality on the rise, there seemed every reason to argue for anarchism and for a revolutionary change in Irish society. This has not changed.

Like most socialists we share a fundamental belief that capitalism is the problem. We believe that as a system it must be ended, that the wealth of society should be commonly owned and that its resources should be used to serve the needs of humanity as a whole and not those of a small greedy minority. But, just as importantly, we see this struggle against capitalism as also being a struggle for freedom. We believe that socialism and freedom must go together, that we cannot have one without the other.

Anarchism has always stood for individual freedom. But it also stands for democracy. We believe in democratising the workplace and in workers taking control of all industry. We believe that this is the only real alternative to capitalism with its ongoing reliance on hierarchy and oppression and its depletion of the world’s resources.

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Note:
We have received some feedback regarding a reference to the Anti-Poll Tax Federation in the article from our last issue titled “Single Issue Campaigns, Community Syndicalism and Direct Democracy”. Unfortunately there isn’t space to add it to this issue, but it has been added to the article’s webpage at wsm.ie/c/campaigns-community-syndicalism-direct-democracy



Rethinking Class: From Recomposition to Counterpower

If we were to strip the anarchist programme of the early 21st century down to its irreducible components, they would have to include at least these four; direct democracy, direct action, recomposition and full communism. Of those four this article is about the third term, recomposition, probably less familiar to most, and particularly around the category that gives it life – class.

Against universalism, against utopianism

The term class divides people into two camps. One which seems to uphold its validity with an almost cult-like intensity, and a much larger camp that is at best undecided, but mostly turned off entirely by it, particularly by the apparently religious fervour of those in the first camp.

Given the fact of this starting point, the most obvious question is - Is class still a useful idea? Is there any mileage to be gained from including class in our analysis or should we instead, just dispense with it and go with the raw econometrics of inequality?

Today books like *The Spirit Level*, try to recast the old discourses of socialism against poverty and class injustice, as appeals to universal rationality. Inequality, they say, leads to measurably worse social outcomes on a whole number of levels. The graphs and the statistics they muster should surely convince any putative social engineers, with a scientifically neutral interest in the social policies most proven to maximise social utility, of the sanity, the "rationality" of more egalitarian policies.

What does the concept of class add to that? In what way does class step outside the "rationalist" programme? Simply put, by rejecting its unspoken, underlying presupposition – by rejecting universalism - the idea of pre-existing universal interests.

A class analysis accepts the reality that the status

quo is not against everyone's interests. Thus, any attempt to construct a programme of radical social change in the name of the "general interest" is doomed to failure. Because there can be no universal interests so long as the interests of even a tiny few resist change. In fact it is the very ability of a tiny minority to make its own interests rule over those of the vast majority that is one of the most important things that needs to be changed.

More than this, a class perspective is not simply the foundation of a critique of what currently exists, and an analysis of what needs to change, but also implies a strategy for how that change could be brought about. In the matter of strategy, a class perspective rejects the "rationalist" programme as utopian.

What does it mean to say that a programme for social change is utopian? In the first instance it means that the programme has no obvious strategy for how it is to be brought about, other than a vague notion of - if you educate enough people about its desirability, then somehow it will be brought about through weight of numbers and the force of public opinion.

On a deeper level, utopian programmes are differentiated from instrumental and prefigurative ones on the basis of the means-ends relationship. To start with the most familiar case, instrumentalism is the position that "the end justifies the means". That is, if the goal is one that significantly increases

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WORDS:
PAUL BOWMAN

social good or the welfare of the masses, then any squeamishness about using deceptive, manipulative or manifestly unjust methods to achieve it is a case of misplaced scruples, or "bourgeois morality". For instrumentalists, there is a total disconnect between means and ends.

The prefigurative approach holds, by contrast, that there is an inherent link between means and ends. For example, if kangaroo courts or summary execution are used to rid society of a genuine evil-doer, the use of improper methods lays the foundation for miscarriages of justice in the future. The very means used to achieve a goal necessarily leave its mark in the end result, in the prefigurative view. For example, the famous Sonvilier Circular issued to all sections of the First International by the Jura Federation in 1871, declared that

"A class analysis accepts the reality that the status quo is not against everyone's interests."

The future society must be nothing else than the universalisation of the organisation that the International has formed for itself. We must therefore strive to make this organisation as close as possible to our ideal. How could one expect an egalitarian society to emerge out of an authoritarian organisation? It is impossible. The International, embryo of the future society, must from now on faithfully reflect our principles of federation and liberty, and must reject any principle tending toward authority and dictatorship.

However, recognising the link between the means employed and the ends achieved, as prefiguration does, must not mean mistaking the one for the other, for confusing means and ends.

This error of confusing means and ends is the starting point for utopianism. From the utopian viewpoint the end and the means are simply one. If you want to change social relations all you have to do is for a group of well-meaning volunteers to begin practising the new relations amongst themselves and spread their adoption through the power of example, education and propaganda. This perspective mistakenly confuses interpersonal relations, which can, with effort and struggle, be changed by the voluntary actions of a few, with social relationships, which cannot.

To take another historical example, Robert Owen, in his 1819 *An Address to the Working Classes* states that because the new (communist) society will be an improvement in the conditions of all members of society, there is therefore no fundamental conflict between classes, in the here and now to prevent its achievement. Hence Owen is generally categorised as a utopian socialist (and not just by Marxists).

Despite the clear difference between prefigurative and utopian approaches, the two continue to be confused today. Partly this is deliberate on the part of instrumentalists like Leninists and other authoritarian Marxists and socialists, who are hostile to prefiguration on principle. But partly it is genuine confusion on behalf of those, who through naivety or lack of critical ability, read the Sonvilier meta-

phor about the International being the embryo of the new society growing within the bosom of the old too literally.

So, in the question of class this question has significant meaning. If we aspire to a classless society, it is not enough to start by pretending that class doesn't exist. Such a confusion of means and ends would be hopelessly utopian and would ignore the fact that class is not simply a subjective phenomenon, but has an objective material basis that persists regardless of individual beliefs.

Newer than you think

The line from the opening of Marx & Engels' 1848 *Communist Manifesto* that "all history is the history of class struggle" is well known. But historically, the use of the term "class" to talk of different sections of society really only comes into common use around the time of the rise of capitalism.

So long as society was politically constituted by dividing its members into formal ranks or orders, then the particular oppressions and injustices relative to one's caste, estate or rank were the natural focus of people's struggle for freedom. For slaves the struggle for freedom was the struggle against slavery, for serfs that against serfdom, for untouchables the struggle against the caste system. It is only with the formal constitution of society as one in which all its members are legally equal, formally free, that the question of class comes to the fore.

Class is a result of our paradoxical situation of being legally free, in the political sphere, while being unfree in the economic sphere. So saying, it is peculiar to the historically unique set of social relations that effects a relative separation between the spheres of the political and the economic, based on the separation of producer from the means of production that allows this paradoxical, schizoid, situation to exist.

"With the progressive dismantling of formal rank, talk of 'lower orders' was increasingly replaced by references to the 'lower classes'."

In the feudal and absolutist societies that pre-dated capitalism it was common to speak of particular sections of society either by name (lord, peasant, clergy) or by reference to the formally defined hierarchy of ranked society – the higher and lower orders. With the progressive dismantling of formal rank, talk of "lower orders" was increasingly replaced by references to the "lower classes". The shift from orders to classes reflected that social position was no longer explicitly dictated by sovereign power, but that persistent inequality continued.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, the use of "classes" was universal in regular discourse. The idea then that "class" is somehow an invention of socialism or the left, is a historical nonsense. However the transition from "classes", in the sense of the lower, poorer, "dangerous" or working classes, to the notion of a "working class", singular, was the result of the historical development of working class power as antagonistic to the dominant interests in society.

Neither up nor down

Of course it would be pointless to skip to the conclusion at the start of an article, but it may be useful to have something in mind already, even if only some negative definitions – i.e. focusing on what class is not.

There is no up or down in class. The capitalist class is no nearer god on high, nor the proletariat closer to the devil down below – no matter how hellish our lives may become sometimes. Even if it still haunts our language (and that of sociologists), there is no basis for the vertical metaphor inherited from the feudal social pyramid. Class is not a stratum or other "geological" feature, nor is it yet an identity or a cultural grouping. Indeed, it is not a "thing" at all. Nor is it a unity of action or a unity of interests – even if such can potentially be constructed upon it. It cannot be reduced to either an exclusively objective category or an exclusively subjective one.

Also we are not interested here in class as a trans-historical concept, but one historically specific to capitalism. From that starting point we can say that the objective determination of class relates to the situation of people relative to the process of exploitation, that is the expansion of capital by the accumulation of surplus value. Further, that as one of, if not the unique specific characteristic of capitalist social relations is the relative disjunction of power into two distinct spheres – of political and economic power, via the relative autonomisation of relations of domination and exploitation – that class is specific to the sphere of exploitation, as distinct from that of domination, as we shall see later on.



The centre cannot hold

Leading on from that last point, a recent document from the Brazilian Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro (FARJ) has this to say:

"Within our vision of social anarchism, as "a fundamental tool for the support of daily struggles", we also need to clarify our definition of class. While considering the class struggle as central and absolutely relevant in society today we understand that the Marxists, by choosing the factory worker

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as the unique and historic subject of the revolution, despite all other categories of the exploited classes, while also potentially revolutionary subjects. The authoritarians' conception of the working class, which is restricted only to the category of industrial workers, does not cover the reality of the relations of domination and exploitation that have occurred throughout history and even the relationships that occur in this society. Just as it does not cover the identification of revolutionary subjects of the past and present.

Authoritarians, including some who call themselves anarchists, think of the centre as a means, and orientate their politics towards it. For them, the centre – considering this to be the state, the party, the army, the position of control – is an instrument for the emancipation of society, and “the revolution means in first place the capturing of the centre and its power structure, or the creation of a new centre”. The authoritarians' very conception of class is based on the centre, when defining the industrial proletariat as a historical subject [...] and excludes and marginalises other categories of the exploited classes that are in the periphery like, for example, the peasantry.”

And they go on to list examples of different sections of those being exploited, dispossessed or otherwise excluded by capital in Brazil, including not only the wage-earning industrial proletariat, but also the precarious informal workers and unemployed of the favelas, as well as the indigenous inhabitants of the Amazon, struggling to avoid dispossession and extinction at the hands of the loggers and the ranchers.

Without passing judgment on the validity of the centre-periphery model the FARJ adopted in this 2008 text, we want to draw attention above all to their critique of the “traditional” or “orthodox” Marxist conceptualisation of the working class. That is, as being viably represented by the central “class figure” of the wage-earning industrial worker, who in his or her (but mostly his) person not only represents the “vanguard” of the proletariat, but can in practice substitute for the rest of the class. That their interests can stand in place of those of less “central” elements of the dispossessed. The clear parallel between this “class substitutionism” and the politics of Leninist style vanguard party substitutionism or the electoral representation of the social-democratic Marxist party are obvious.

Operaismo and Class Composition

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the smaller Socialist Party (PSI), despite having built up considerable power in its partisan units, opted to collaborate with the bourgeois parties in founding the post-Fascist Italian state, becoming part of its “constitutional arch”. This policy of rebuilding liberal democracy and modern capitalism, rather than pushing for revolution, became a foundational axiom of Communist politics in post-war Italy.

During this time Italian industry was greatly modernised, particularly in the automobile industry, led by the iconic FIAT. This process was accompanied by a vast internal migration of young Italian workers from the pre-industrial South to the factory towns of Northern Italy. The young Southerners, coming from areas where the Communists had been repressed by a combination of the Mafia, the Christian Democrats (DC) and economic underdevelopment, had no allegiance to the traditions of the PCI affiliated trade unionised workers of the older Northern working class. In many cases they

were brought in by the management with the deliberate intention of using them as scab labour. As a strategy this has to go down as one resulting in one of the biggest backfires in Italian, or even European, history. Although lacking the tradition of subordination to trade union bureaucrats, the new generation of Southern workers brought with them their own traditions of explosive resistance which led, ultimately, to the most intense and sustained period of heightened class struggle in post-war Western Europe.

It's a testimony to the creative power of periods of mass social upheaval, as well as a commentary

“... the operaisti understood that the introduction of new machinery by the bosses was a strategy in the class war.”

on the intellectually stifling nature of official Communism, that this period also produced some of the most creative outpourings of new theorisation of class struggle, alongside the actual struggles themselves. Forced into choosing between the PCI's alliance with the bosses, and the wild, fierce indiscipline of the new young rebel workers, the generation of young militant thinkers who followed their hearts, were to articulate a whole new universe of political theories and practices.

We cannot possibly do justice to this period here, instead we will try to pick out one or two concepts that are most useful to us in elaborating a theory of class. A number of the new theorists, aligned with the militant worker resistance of the 1960s, grouped around the journals *Quaderni Rossi* (Red Notebooks) and *Classe Operaia* (Working Class)

became known as the *operaisti* (the workerists). Their number included writers like Raniero Panzieri (the co-founder of *Quaderni Rossi*), theorists like Mario Tronti, the founder of *Classe Operaia*, and a young Toni Negri, along with the radical sociologists Romano Alquati and Danilo Montaldi, whose practice of *conricerca* (co-research) produced much of the raw material that fed the operaisti's re-thinking of Marxist orthodoxy. It is their theory of class composition that we are interested in here.

Class composition was seen as consisting of two distinct but linked concepts - the technical composition of the class, and the political composition - and two interrelated processes of decomposition and recomposition.

The distinction between the technical and political composition of the class was taken, by analogy, from a heretical reading of Marx's *Capital*. In volume 1 and 3, Marx talks about the ratio between living labour and inert materials of production, plant, etc, in the immediate production process in terms of the technical and value compositions of capital. Roughly speaking, the technical composition relates the physical organisation of the production process, along with a (conceptual) measure of the ratio in terms of objective “masses” of the relevant component - i.e. hours of labour versus kilowatts of electricity, kilograms or litres of raw materials and so on. The value composition is the ratio considered in terms of the cost price of the various inputs to production.

The analogy the *operaisti* took from this is the distinction between the objective composition of the working class - i.e. on a macro scale, how many people work in agriculture, manufacturing, public sector, housework, etc.; on the scale of an individual enterprise, how many people work on particular production lines, how many in the design office, how many in transport, etc. This is the technical composition of the class, which changes according to changes in production methods, increases in productivity, etc, along with changes in the differing amounts and types of goods produced and circulated within a given society.

In contrast to the technical composition, the political composition of the class consisted of the “subjective” element - i.e. people's awareness of being part of a wider social group, their identification as



"The "social worker" enclosed the new categories of precarious students, scraping by on subventions, informal economy work, and the unwaged housework of women."

workers, or people subjected to work, their identification with or antagonism to their immediate bosses, and groups of bosses or representatives of the state in a wider social context. As well as subjective elements of beliefs, cultures, values and habits and practices of resistance, there are practices of organisation - the creation of both formal and informal organisations to pursue distinct class goals, whether of self-defence or attack.

But the major innovation was an understanding of how these two compositions were related to each other and an understanding of how changes in each led to changes in the other, indeed became strategies for effecting change in the other.

The official line from the PCI was that the "development of the forces of production", i.e. the introduction of mechanisation and automation in the factories, was a politically neutral "objective" increase in the social good of higher productivity, laying the basis for future socialist abundance. In contrast the *operaisti* understood that the introduction of new machinery by the bosses was a strategy in the class war. Specifically it was the changing of the technical composition of the immediate process of production, in order to break down the political composition of a working class power which sought to autonomously control and limit the rate of production for their own benefit. That is to say that the bosses were changing the technical composition in order to decompose the existing political composition that was proving a barrier to profitability or, abstractly, the boundless drive for the expansion of capital. In response to the political decomposition brought about by such changes, the challenge for the working class was the recomposition of a new political composition capable, once again, of exercising counter-power in the newly transformed circumstances.

All of this (and more) was articulated by the *operaisti* as a result of their studies of struggles within the factories of FIAT, Olivetti and other Italian workplaces. But as the 1960s went on, the noises from movements and milieus outside the factory gates in wider society, grew too large to ignore. The burgeoning numbers of militant students, clashing with authorities and cops, posed a challenge to the *operaisti's* narrow factory-based view of the class. A second but no less important challenge to the factoryism of the *operaisti* came from the growing feminist movement. The feminists challenged the invisibility of women's unpaid work

in the household and in reproducing the labour power of children and workers. Was their labour to be discounted entirely?

In the face of these and other challenges, the *operaisti* looked to some of the other ideas they had been developing in opposition to the theory of the PCI. Official communism asserted that the advent of Keynesian planning, at a social level, was actually part of a gradual transition to socialist planning. By contrast the *operaisti* rejected the idea that state planning was "non-capitalist" or transitional in any way, just as they had rejected the "neutrality" of automation, and elaborated a theory of "Social Capital" (as in Tronti's essay of the same name) as capable of carrying out planning, but only according to a capitalist rationality.

The operaist notion of "Social Capital" became the foundation for a theory of capitalist social relations reaching its tentacles outside of the factory gates and embracing all of society into its process and transforming society as a whole into a "Social Factory". Whereas they had previously theorised the generational clash in the factories between older, PCI union men and the young, migrant unskilled workers, as the transition from the "skilled worker" to the "mass worker", now the "new composition" meant the rise of the "*social worker*" as the new dominant class figure. The social worker enclosed the new categories of precarious students, scraping by on subventions, informal economy work, and the unwaged housework of women.

Here we see that the notion of class composition can be developed in two directions. The first is to see class composition as the search for the new antagonistic social subject - the new "class figure" - in the vein criticised by FARJ above. This has been the route since followed, by the likes of Toni Negri and his followers, who have moved through a succession of putative class figures, beginning with the mass worker and social worker, through the "precarious worker", the "cognitariat" or "immaterial worker" to today's "multitude". A similar line leads Paul Mason to his "networked individual", which owes much to Negri's immaterial worker. In both cases there is an implied technological determinism, hidden in Negri's case, openly admitted in Mason's. This occludes the phase of the political recomposition of the class in the original formulation, and takes it as given by the objective forces of historical development - capital once again (au-

"...the political recomposition of the class ... remains a goal that must be actively articulated, advocated, politically fought for and organisationally solidified in order to be made concrete."

tomatically) producing its own gravediggers, as in the old orthodox Marxist belief.

The second take on class composition re-emphasises its nature as a process, not a "thing" - a new "central figure". From this perspective the false assumption of the semi-automatic emergence of political recomposition is making the utopian error of presupposing what must be achieved. Further, all notions of history blindly marching to a predestined goal are dispensed with from the outset. Starting from the position of the decomposition of the class, through a change in the technical composition of production - such as the relocation of production across international production chains achieved by globalism - the political recomposition of the class cannot be taken for granted. It remains a goal that must be actively articulated, advocated, politically fought for and organisationally solidified in order to be made concrete.

This second position is the one I term the perspective of recomposition - putting the emphasis on the process, rather than the "object" of class composition. A generation again, the US autonomist magazine Zerowork defined class recomposition as:

"the overthrow of capitalist divisions, the creation of new unities between different sectors of the class, and an expansion of the boundaries of what the 'working class' comes to include."

More than this, even within the perspective of recomposition as process and project, we can draw a line between the instrumental and prefigurative approaches. That is, we can define a specifically anarchist or libertarian take on the project of the recomposition of the class. But before we do that, given that the political recomposition of the class necessarily involves the plane of subjectivity, there is another aspect we must look at first.

Class and Identity

Otherness is socially constructed. Through socialisation we become either man or woman, white or black, straight or queer, normal or other. In the social construction of otherness, both poles of the relation must be explicitly present. The normal defines the other by projection in ways described by feminist or queer theory authors or Edward Said's criticism of "orientalism" or Deleuze & Guattari's becoming-other. These mutually defining poles of subjectification multiply and proliferate in the social sphere and can be combined through conjunction.

But class, as we have seen, is not an identity, nor a socially constructed role. Hence the conjunction of otherness breaks down at the class line. There is no contradiction in the conjugation of othernesses when a person identifies, for example, as a woman AND as black AND as queer. We understand that each category of otherness neither wholly encompasses nor wholly excludes the others, that their conjugation is a process of defining the overlapping of these sets that are inscribed within the same social plane that constructs identities and particular oppressions through the operation of polarising normativities in contrast to otherness. But when we try to add class to the chain of conjugation - woman AND black AND queer AND working class - something jars. Consciously or not, we perceive that something about the last term in the conjugation does not fit with the previous ones. Society not only does not contest that the speaker is a black queer woman, it asserts it before she even speaks. In drawing attention to these identities the speaker is only re-asserting what is already so-

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cially constructed, or imposed, as fact – even if the speaker is challenging the meaning of these social facts, or the power that constructed them. But in relation to class there is no such social recognition forthcoming, on the question of whether class is a social fact in the same way as femininity, blackness or queerness, there is only silence. And as Derrida taught us, we must listen for the silences because they teach us most of all.

Without pursuing that further, at this stage, we see also that there is a problem with the process of defining class on this basis, which after this conjugation is made, must, retrospectively, be carried out in an analogous manner to other particular oppressions. Because otherness is defined through exclusion and oppression, then class in turn must also be so defined. The experience of class then becomes reduced to social exclusion – the snobbery and exclusivity of the “middle class” – and the oppressions of economic deprivation – poverty. But to reduce class to a relation of economic oppression by poverty, is to reduce economic life to that privileged sphere of capitalist universality – consumerism. So long as class is reduced to economic oppression, in turn reduced to relative deprivation in command power in the market for consumer goods, then it loses any meaning in relation to exploitation, the production of surplus value and the valorisation of capital and, ultimately, the active production of the totality of social relations. It becomes a passive category, a doubly passive one when we take on board the failure for it to be actively constructed by the dominant social discourse, as already noted. Reduced to this doubly passive status, the category of class becomes a mere ghost compared to the identities actively produced by the discourses of power, and must ultimately fade into the universalist background.

Let’s be clear, the universal admits no other. That is, another to itself, as opposed to the particular others it constructs by valorising corresponding norms. It cannot and must not do so – the universal is the social plane within which all particular others are inscribed. To struggle against the oppressions specific to a given category of otherness is to assert your right to the universal, at least by default in the first instance, not that this is the predetermined limit of such struggles. Nor, let’s be clear again, should we be opposed to the consciousness raising strategy of contrasting the ideal of equal human rights for all, with the reality of particular oppressions that make a mockery of such rights. It is both a natural and a necessary first step. The blockage arises if the composition of a movement against particular oppressions fails to go beyond that first step, and remains constrained within the bourgeois horizon of universalism – a horizon that fails to challenge the separation of the political sphere from the economic. Universalism is the utopianism of capital.

It is when sections of that movement break with those liberal or bourgeois elements determined to remain safely within the bourgeois horizon, and raise the question of the economic injustices accompanying and implicated with the particular political oppressions, that the intersection between domination and exploitation is opened up as an active front in the recomposition of an antagonistic counterpower.

The overlapping of socially-constructed identities must not be confused with the intersection of the plane of domination with the plane of exploitation. The intersection of the plane of exploitation with the plane of domination describes a line – the class line. That class line cuts blindly through all identities inscribed on the plane of political determination, without exception. There is no identity yet created from which capital cannot recruit agents to its side

to represent its interests to those on the other side of the class line.

But if the class line can divide particular identities constructed in the place of subjectification, the hierarchy that sets some identities over others needs to find an institutionalisation in the technical composition of social production, in order to materially reinforce its divisions. Within Western Europe and the US, consumer magazines congratulate women that they are the inheritors of the gains of the feminist movements of the 1960s and 70s, but women’s wages still remain 20% below that of men for the same work, on average. Similarly racism has never co-existed with equal access to different employment opportunities for white and black workers.

This intersection works both ways. We can see the cross-contamination of the plane of subjectification into the plane of exploitation most clearly with the phenomena of the racialisation of class, or particularly, of the so-called urban “underclass”. For example, in Ireland, a minority section of the inner city residents of the major urban centres (Dublin, Cork, Limerick) are stigmatised as “knackers” or similar. Here a double racism is in operation. On the one hand, the generalisation of racist epithets normally aimed at Irish Travellers, deny their existence as a genuine Irish ethnic minority. On the other, the residents of the most deprived inner-city neighbourhoods are castigated as culturally ignorant, intellectually inferior, and sexually degenerate in the classic tropes of racism. As a result, a proportion of the urban working class, are practically forced to change their vocabulary, disguise or modify their accents and change how they dress in order to get employment in the very city in which they were born and brought up.

A libertarian project of recomposition

Having looked at the intersection between class and identity, we can return to the task of outlining a libertarian perspective on class recomposition.

First the challenge of prefiguration is that, in the process of creating the cultural and organisational forms of class power and autonomy, we do not unconsciously recreate and mimic the decompositional hierarchies of identity and exclusion that permeate the society around us. That is, we do not aim to include women, people of colour and others within our organisations simply on the instrumental basis that, together, all the people excluded from the “norm” of white, cis, het, male, able-bodied, working age workers, actually make up the majority of our class, but because the inclusive approach reflects the kind of society we aim to create.

When we talk of a project of class recomposition, we need to be careful that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. Particularly of those late 19th and early 20th century socialists who constructed a class identity in a one-sided economic way. That is, one that sees the class from the perspective of capital – i.e. as composed of the possessors of labour power, as “factory hands” or simply as “mere workers”. Even though the socialist movement of the turn of the 20th century tried to reclaim the identity of “worker” as a positive identity, even a heroic figure – the good worker versus the bad capitalist – far too much was given away by simply trying to invert the capitalist framing of the exploited class as mere workers. As Mario Tronti said in the 1960s:

“Workers have no time for the dignity of labor. The “pride of the producer” they leave entirely to the boss. Indeed, only the boss now remains to declaim eulogies in praise of labor. True, in the organized

working-class movement this traditional chord is, unfortunately, still to be heard – but not in the working class itself; here there is no longer any room for ideology.”

Today we need to understand ourselves not from a one-sided perspective, but from a many-sided, all-round view. One that starts not from the cycle of capital’s reproduction, but from our own cycle of our reproduction as social human beings. In that sense, wherever there is confrontation between people’s direct material and social needs and the drive for profit accumulation, there is class struggle in potential. Of course to move from potential to fact, people need to see the common ground between their individual needs and those of others in the same situation of conflict with the system as them. This is not the automatic product of mysterious “historical forces” but the practical task of organising.

Although wage labour is a key part of the class conflict, it is not the whole of the class relation, by any means. The confrontation between capital’s drive for self-expansion and the cycle of human self-reproduction can take the form of confrontations around so-called “primitive accumulation” – the ongoing forcing off the land of traditional peoples engaged in subsistence economies – such as continues today in the Amazon basin and the forests of India and many other places around the globe. It includes the struggles of landless peasants for land; it includes the struggles of slum-dwellers against developers trying to clear them out of their homes for new development. It includes the struggles of unemployed single mothers in Western European council estates for decent childcare and facilities for children that will give them options beyond joyriding and drug dealing.

Conclusion

The class line remains the San Andreas fault-line of capitalist society. It remains the only fault-line with the power to create a rupture strong enough to bring down the whole edifice of the capitalist social order. This remains as true today as it was at the beginning of capitalist class society. In answer to the question we posed ourselves at the start of this article – is class still a useful tool for the project of social transformation – we can conclude that it is not only useful but necessary.

Simply put, so long as the majority of people do not perceive their material interests to be in some way fundamentally in conflict with the basic mechanics of capitalism, then so long will the project of ending capitalism with the consent and participation of the vast majority of society remain a pipe dream. To paraphrase Voltaire’s quip about the necessity of inventing god, just because class really does exist, does not mean it isn’t necessary to continually re-invent it. Today, in the 21st century, the project of the recomposition of an antagonistic class counterpower that can not only resist capital, but work towards its destruction remains as vital as ever.

This article is an edited version of a longer piece, online at wsm.ie/recomposition. The web version includes sections on class and the environment and the so-called “middle class”, along with footnotes and references.





Not Waving but Drowning: Precarity and the Working Class

Since the birth of the organised labour movement there have been intermittent claims that some alteration in the conditions of workers had rendered class struggle irrelevant or who suggested that class stratification meant that different workers had different interests and thus could not take united action. This was apparent in the struggle between craft unionism and syndicalism in the days of Connolly and Larkin, or the mantra that "the class struggle is over" in more recent times.

The current economic crises and the neo-liberal program of austerity that has ensued has blown the latter theory out of the water but the idea that different groups of workers have interests so disparate that unity is impossible has arisen in a new form. The "precariat" is heralded by some, both inside and outside of its ranks as a new class whose conditions and interests are separate from the traditional working class. If this was true, the view of class struggle as capital versus labour would be obsolete. Anarchists and other socialists would have to completely rethink their politics and possibly even give up on the idea of building a movement capable of carrying out a radical transformation of society.

The precariat can be loosely defined as workers in short term, part time labour, working irregular hours, who experience intermittent periods of unemployment and who, when not selling their labour, are working to sell themselves by writing C.V.'s and attending job interviews. The precarity of their economic situation seeps into the rest of their lived experience as they move from flat to house share, to live with their parents and back to renting again.

Some of those trying to build a space for the precariat within an anti-capitalist framework see the need to dispense with the politics of the past and develop a theory and practice fit for these new times. The Swedish autonomist group Prekariatet rejects the "previous Marxist and feminist frameworks" and declares "we allow ourselves to start from zero and experiment, make mistakes, and learn and progress as we go." [1]

Culture, Alienation, Boredom and Despair

In his book *Precariat: The New and Dangerous Class*, the academic Guy Standing describes the subjective experience of members of the precariat as one defined by "anger, anomie, anxiety and alienation" [2]. Anger emanates from living a life of relative deprivation, scraping by to make ends meet while being surrounded by consumer culture and the screaming excess of celebrity lifestyles. The actions of looters during last year's London riots, spilling out of retail outlets laden with expensive sportswear and flat screen televisions was an expression of frustration by those whose prospects of upward mobility and middle class prosperity are close to zero.

"Anomie is a feeling of passivity born of despair." [3] The successive defeats of the labour movement internationally over the last few decades have left a whole generation of workers without any hope of improving their situation. They are faced with a lifetime moving from the dole queue to boring, short term contract jobs with low pay and back again. There is no prospect of career progression or job security.

Without job security there is no life security. Feelings of anxiety arise over bills, rent and providing for family. When unemployment is high and union representation is non-existent, one mistake can cost someone their job. Many employers now hire workers as contractors rather than as company employees. Because they are classed as self-employed, they can be fired easier and at the same time, their entitlement to state benefits is reduced.



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"The actions of looters during last year's London riots, spilling out of retail outlets laden with expensive sports-wear and flat screen televisions was an expression of frustration by those whose prospects of upward mobility and middle class prosperity are close to zero."

The concept of alienation is not a new one for those familiar with left wing theory. It stems from workers having no control of the product of their labour, producing goods and services not for themselves or their communities but for others to sell and profit from. Standing maintains that the precariat experiences alienation in a magnified form, being also subject to "the cult of positive thinking". The modern worker is expected to be a happy member of the team, working with others towards a common purpose. They are not just alienated from the product of their labour but are also forced to sell their personality and sociability.

Nowhere is this heightened alienation more apparent than in the field of customer service. "Here the demand to 'just be yourself' (is) nothing but a cunning way of capturing the much needed sociality of the employee: affability on the phone, friendliness, and intuition"[4] Celine, a part-time worker in the service industry describes the process of selling this side of yourself: "One of the worst things you hear when you're going for a job interview is that line 'we're all a big family here', because then you know you're going to have to be this artificially bubbly character that gets on with the staff and can have a bit of banter with the customers and it creates that weird relationship with management where you're supposed to pretend you get along but you're really just working for them."[5]

Standing on Quicksand

The deterioration of the subjective experience of working people on its own however, doesn't con-

stitute the birth of a new class. There would have to be a major change in objective circumstances and particularly a seismic shift in social relations. To prove this it would have to be demonstrated that the relationship between the precariat and capital was qualitatively different to that between the traditional working class and capital. When Guy Standing begins to outline the essential difference between the objective conditions of the precariat and the proletariat, his theory begins to sink into the quicksand upon which it is built.

"The precariat was not part of the 'working class' or the 'proletariat'. The latter term suggests a society consisting mostly of workers in long term, stable, fixed hour jobs with established routes of advancement, subject to unionisation and collective agreements, with job titles their fathers and mothers would have understood, facing local employers whose names and features they were familiar with."[6]In other words, the socio-economic situation of the working class is defined by Standing as the possession of job security, a living wage, the right to organise and a personal relationship with the boss.

The working class as described above however, only existed for a brief time and won those conditions through decades of organisation and strikes where many went to prison or were killed in the process. The factory or office worker who worked nine to five, Monday to Friday was largely confined to the white male of Western Europe, the Soviet bloc, and North America. Around the rest of the world, workers were subject to long hours, casual work, poverty and the threat of state repression if they tried to unionise.

Even within those areas where years of struggle had provided some sort of security for men, migrants and women found themselves taking insecure, part time employment as cleaners, hotel workers, and domestic servants. In Ireland, the idea of permanent employment was a product of the nineteen nineties, when the Celtic Tiger boom brought previously unknown levels of prosperity that are now receding as quickly as they emerged. Right up until the mid-nineties the standard Irish working class experience consisted of the dole queue, short term factory work or farm labouring, bounced paychecks and one way tickets to Holyhead or Boston.

Broadly speaking, the working class has always been defined by anarchists and Marxists alike as those who are bound to sell their labour to those who possess the means of production in the form of private property. This includes the Fordist factory worker, the office clerk, the farm labourer, the cleaner and even those classed as self employed who contract themselves to a large employer. It is the relationship between labour and capital that defines class, not the length of a contract or the number of days a week worked.

The Stainless Steel Claw of the Market

If the working conditions of the precariat are almost identical to the conditions of majority of the last century's working class, why is it being discussed as if it is something new? The answer may be that it is not what is happening that's important, it is who it's happening to. Now, people who were redefining themselves as middle class, who had attended university and saw the prospect of upward social mobility as a given, are feeling the pain. "The articulation of precarity

in recent years is... due to 'its discovery among those who had not expected it'; those who might previously have been shielded by the relative stability of Fordism."[7]

Like all good movie victims, the precarious subject had let its guard down. It seemed as if the spectre of unemployment was a thing of the past. The confident, educated, post-industrial worker could leave one job on Friday and walk into a new one on Monday. Our generation's future was paved with gold or at least gold credit cards. When it was least expected, the villain that was assumed vanquished re-appeared in the form of the financial crisis and the economic shock doctrine that accompanied it.

By the end of the July 2012 in Ireland, there were over four hundred and sixty thousand people signing on the live register. Over eighty thousand of these were registered as casual workers (working three days or less). This figure doesn't account for people working more than three days who only work a few hours a day, those who don't know they are entitled to sign or those who have a partner with means from insurable employment. Fifty six percent of the total live register was made up of short term claimants. This suggests that there is a constant turnover of people moving from the dole to short term contract and insecure employment as the live register figure itself has stayed relatively static over the last year. [8]

The relatively sudden rise in unemployment and precarity had a knock on effect in housing. The tiger generation saw the biggest rise in home-ownership in the history of the Irish state. Of course "ownership" in the majority of cases meant mortgage holding. When the crisis hit and the toll on the labour market became apparent, this translated into a meteoric rise in negative equity mortgages, arrears and reposessions. At the end of March of this year, over seventy seven thousand mortgages (10.2% of total stock) were in arrears of over ninety days. Almost sixty thousand of these were in arrears of over one hundred and eighty days. Legal proceedings were issued to enforce the debt on two hundred and seventy eight mortgages and one hundred and seventy of these were repossessed.[9]

Homelessness is also on the rise. It is difficult to obtain precise statistics on this phenomenon but the 2011 census recorded three thousand eight hundred homeless people, with over three thousand seven hundred of these in accommodation for the homeless. Half of those aged fifteen or over were in employment, while four hundred and fifty seven were children under the age of fourteen. Nine hundred and five people comprised two hundred and ninety six family units. [10]

We Are Just Statistics

What is startling about these figures is that a large proportion of homeless people do not fit the stereotype of the person living rough, who is alone, unemployed and perhaps unemployable. The picture they actually paint is of the sharp end of precarity in the Irish state. Government statistics however, tell a limited story. The numbers classified as homeless by the CSO only represents people on the streets or in designated accommodation for the homeless. It does not account for the thousands of others whose housing situation is precarious, who have been forced to couch surf at friends houses, adults who have

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had to move in with their parents or those who are constantly under threat of losing their homes due to low wages, unemployment or underemployment.

The Roman poet Horace wrote that "we are just statistics, born to consume resources." Horace was the favourite poet of the Emperor Octavian and a mouthpiece for the new imperial order. The language of the state's statistical data presentation replicates this attitude. The terms casual worker, unemployed, underemployed and job-seeker mask the fact that the problem is not necessarily whether one is unemployed or underemployed but whether one possesses the income necessary to live comfortably. They also hide the subjective experience of the precarious individual, the emotional and psychological effects of precarity and the restrictions it places upon life outside of work.

Paradoxically, it seems the more time the modern worker spends out of work the less freedom they possess. The next offer of work may be only hours away, so constant availability is a must. Celine's leisure time is regularly disturbed by a phone call from the job. "I find it very difficult to plan ahead. I'm supposed to be given three days notice before I'm working but that rarely happens. A lot of the time it can be less than two days notice and it's often less than twelve hours notice." [10] Constant availability places huge strains on the individual and their ability to lead a normal life. It is common to hear people talking of not being allowed time off work for funerals or family emergencies at short notice. One individual had been refused time off to attend his own graduation. [12]

With the labour market firmly favouring employers, scenarios like this are hard to avoid. Long commutes are no longer a reason to refuse a job. Neither is low pay or the knowledge that the job may only last a couple of weeks. Moving from one neighbourhood to another because the only job available is on the other side of the city makes it difficult to settle anywhere. Friendships and other personal relationships become precarious and the people around you come to resemble a rotating cast of extras in a television soap opera.



The Troika is Coming, Look Busy

One particular feature of the present age is the move towards the institutionalisation of precarity. If the institutionalisation of Fordism and Taylorism in the last century could be described as the militarisation of labour, then the current trend represents its militia-isation. The demand of

"Friendships and other personal relationships become precarious and the people around you come to resemble a rotating cast of extras in a television soap opera."

constant availability is no longer the preserve of the small employer; it also extends to the corporation and the state. The corporation demands we take our work home, that we are contactable via email and smart phones. The distinction between work time and free time is evaporating. The state however demands that even when we are not linked to a particular employer, we are constantly job seeking, constantly training, always available for welfare reviews and FÁS interviews.

Since the tightening of the grip of the troika over the economic policy of the Irish state with the ratification of the fiscal compact there have been moves towards increased assessment, inspection and regulation of welfare recipients. To speed this up, compulsory personal interviews to assess job prospects or the need for further training with FÁS have been replaced with group sessions that were described by one individual as something like AA meetings for the unemployed. "There were twelve of us at the meeting, mainly lads in their twenties. They sat us down and did a couple of powerpoint presentations, showing us options like Job Bridge or self-employment schemes. The overall message was 'get the fuck off the dole'. No one asked any questions, everyone just wanted to get out as quickly as possible." [13]

Job Bridge is an internship scheme whereby welfare recipients work for six or nine months and are paid their regular social welfare rate plus an extra fifty euro allowance. For anyone working more than twenty seven and a half hours a week, that works out below the minimum wage. It is not yet compulsory, but refusal to attend FÁS interviews or comply with the TÚS community work placement scheme can result in benefits being withdrawn. It would not be a major departure in policy if Job Bridge went the same way. With new profiling measures in place it will become easier to centrally direct labour under the pretence of getting people out of "unemployment traps".

The experience of other EU countries suggests a move in this direction. Workfare, a similar scheme to Job Bridge in the UK is compulsory in some

cases and in cases where it is not strictly mandatory, the threat of sanctions is still used. George Osborne MP stated that "young people who do not engage with this offer will be considered for mandatory work activity and those that drop out without good reason will lose their benefits" [14] There is also evidence that Workfare is replacing paid jobs, with "ASDA sending paid staff home early over the Christmas period and using Workfare to fill the gaps." [15]

Work Less, Live More

Since the beginning of the economic crisis, sections of the left in Ireland and the UK have made the right to work a central demand. While it is important that those who wish to work for a living are given the opportunity, there is a danger of fetishising work for its own sake. The right to work under capitalism means the right to sell one's labour, the right to be exploited by the owners of private property. More often than not it means the right to participate in the production of goods and services that the individual worker has no interest in other than the wage they receive at the end of the week.

In many cases the full time worker finds themselves in a position that is the polar opposite of the precarious worker but is not necessarily more desirable. In the best case scenario, they have a regular income which provides the financial means to live the way they want to, but they don't have the time or energy to do the things they want. Work that takes over the majority of one's life, that is not geared towards one's own abilities and interests can be asphyxiating and dehumanising. The call for the right to work should be accompanied by the adverb "less" and the phrase "for more".

The valorisation of the Fordist worker only became central to the labour movement upon the ascendancy of social democratic and Leninist hegemony. The Russian "Communists" wanted rapid industrialisation and believed that one-man management and bureaucratically centralised production were the best ways to achieve this. The social democrats were in favour of incremental improvements in workers' conditions under capitalism. In both cases Fordism and Taylorism made ideological sense.

The fight for the eight hour day and union recognition in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries however, were not seen as ends in themselves but as a means to an end. The International Workingmen's Association saw it as "a preliminary condition without which all further attempts at improvements and emancipation of the working class must prove abortive". [16] After the eight hour day was won, the expectation was that unions would fight for further improvements and some did. The IWW has been calling for a four hour day for over seventy years and when they adopted that demand, even "the American Federation of Labor was officially committed to the six hour day." [17]

Communism through the Looking Glass

If the goal anarchists are trying to achieve is a libertarian communist society, then the way we think about campaigns for reforms must take that into account. In The German Ideology, Marx wrote that "In communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can

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become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic.”[18]

The condition of the precarity under capitalism in the twenty first century is a perverse mirror image of Marx’s vision of work under communism. The precarious worker has no exclusive sphere of activity but becomes accomplished in none either. It is possible for one to be a barista in January, an office clerk in April, a tour guide in July, a shop assistant in December and a job seeker for the rest of the year, without ever becoming a barista, office clerk, tour guide or shop assistant. Rather than calling for the return of Fordism and specialisation, there is a need to seriously rethink how we get from the current state of things to the society we desire.

“A think-tank, the New Economics Foundation (NEF)... argues that if everyone worked fewer hours – say, 20 or so a week – there would be more jobs to go round, employees could spend more time with their families and energy-hungry excess consumption would be curbed.”[19] Sharing work is important, but the NEF clearly do not advocate a twenty hour week with the same remuneration that is currently applicable for a forty hour week. The implication is that to curb “energy-hungry excess consumption” people would have to earn less and adjust their lifestyles accordingly. Guy Standing on the other hand argues that the state should guarantee a minimum income that would cover life’s necessities while any further income would be accumulated through “work for labour”. [20] This would be funded via taxation and states investing in “emerging economies” I.E. the exploitation of labour in other countries.

Both of these solutions are based on utopian capitalist visions. They rely on legislators that are bought and sold by large corporations to act in the best interests of working people and in both cases they fall way short of those interests. The interests of the majority of the population can only be served by their self-organisation to campaign for improvements in their own living conditions. Our demands however must develop tangentially to forms of exploitation and oppression into an expression of the needs and desires of the broad working class.

The Praxis of Everyday Life

Demands however are nothing without a movement capable of carrying them out. Despite precarious workers being the most exploited sections of the working class, organising them can be problematic. Traditional trade union structures make it difficult to organise workers whose employment is often short term. The effort of joining a union might not seem worth it if you know you’re going to be leaving that job in a matter of weeks or months at which point you’re unemployed or in another job where a different union organises the workforce. Union organisers may not see the point in recruiting members who won’t be there for the long haul, especially where a union is service-orientated.

The early history of the Industrial Workers of the World in the United States holds some lessons for organising today. “They found that membership

tended to swell dramatically with struggles, and then ebb away. It’s been said that “many a worker who did not carry the red membership card or had kept up dues payments was still to be counted a Wobbly.” The IWW was opposed on principle to the kind of incentives for member retention pursued by more mainstream unions, such as health or insurance benefits, and instead opted to deploy a job delegate system. This entailed travelling organisers authorised to collect dues and form union locals amongst the highly mobile, casual workforce of the early 20th century United States. Consequently, ‘a local could exist in the hat or satchel of a mobile delegate.’ [21] What is necessary is an organisation whose structures do not require permanent active membership, where a member can move from job to job and link in with the local section wherever they go. The battles it should take on should come directly from the needs and desires of its members. All too often activists on the left neglect to reflect on their everyday lived experience, preferring to campaign on whatever the big issue of the day is, believing this will encourage people to get involved.

While it may not be necessary to “start from zero” in terms of theory as the Swedish group Prekariatet have suggested, it is a useful approach when tackling demands. Rather than assuming what people’s issues are, organisers should engage in workshops with work colleagues, friends and neighbours to see what common problems people face and come up with ideas for solving them and ways of organising around them. [22]

Beyond the grandiose claims of academics like Guy Standing of the precariat being a new class, there are a growing number of people drowning in a sea of uncertainty. Their passivity can be mistaken for an unwillingness to organise and fight back but it is more likely that they just don’t see the point. Many see the unions as lobby groups for a select group of “privileged” workers with secure, fixed wage jobs and benefits such as pension schemes. The challenge for activists of the left over the coming period is to find ways of organising that are fit for purpose, that are extensions of working and unemployed people’s lived experience and that can also point the way towards a radical transformation of society. The world isn’t static so it is important to keep re-interpreting it, but the point is still to change it.



[1] <http://prekariatet.se>

[2] Standing, Guy, Precariat: The New and Dangerous Class, Bloomsbury Academic, 2011

[3] Ibid.

[4] Cederstrom, Carl and Fleming, Peter, Dead Man Working, Zero Books, 2012

[5] Interview with the author, July 2012

[6] Standing, Guy, Precariat: The New and Dangerous Class, Bloomsbury Academic, 2011

[7] Southwood, Ivor, Non Stop Inertia, Zero Books, 2011

[8] Figures from the Central Statistics Office. (CSO)

[9] Figures from the Central Bank.

[10] CSO

[11] Interview with the author, July 2012

[12] Conversation with the author, September 2012

[13] Interview with the author, September 2012

[14] <http://www.boycottworkfare.org>

[15] ibid

[16] IWA convention, Geneva 1866

[17] <http://www.iww.org>

[18] Marx, Karl, The German Ideology, <http://www.marxists.org>

[19] Cut the working week to a maximum of 20 hours, urge top economists, Heather Stewart, The Observer, 8th of January 2012

[20] Standing, Guy, Precariat: The New and Dangerous Class, Bloomsbury Academic, 2011

[21] Fighting for ourselves – preview, <http://libcom.org/blog/fighting-ourselves-preview-05092012>

[22] For info on activist research see <http://provisional-university.wordpress.com/2012/07/16/notes-on-activist-research-workshop-on-collective/>

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Unveiling Capitalism at Occupy

If the normal way revolutionaries engage in politics is to go to people suffering a particular injustice or oppression, fight it alongside them, and raise their consciousness of the systemic change necessary to end all oppressions; then Occupy was a movement that seemed to be happening the wrong way around.

Occupy started with the broad systemic critique and desire to put it into action, but never made the critique more coherent, nor translated it into the political activity necessary to effect social change at anywhere close to the scale initially hoped for. Obviously the 99%/1% critique was quite vague and ambiguous, but the movement placed central importance in open discussions about big societal issues and its goals and strategies. Despite this being an ideal situation for revolutionaries, our radical analyses didn't win many supporters. A year on from participating in Occupy Cork I ask why, and hope to aid the learning of theoretical and practical lessons for future social movement engagements.

The approaches to consciousness raising vary for revolutionaries of the Marxist-Leninist and anarchist-communist variety. For Leninists, the only correct analysis for overcoming the oppression of capitalism lies in their party, therefore recruitment is central. Once in the party, recruits didactically receive the party analysis, with those not agreeing with it presumed to be labouring under a false consciousness. Anarchists tend to be uncomfortable with such an infallible and hierarchical epistemology, and instead prefer to focus on empowering people to organise and think for themselves. This tends to work very well in aiding understanding of the interpersonal aspects of power relations, and the way oppressive power can manifest itself in groups and through gender, race and other privileges – areas where we have seen huge advances against oppressive power since Marxism lost its hegemonic position as the way to do oppositional politics in the sixties. But with the more impersonal oppression of contem-

porary capitalism in the West, we see both that less people have a critical understanding of it, and that the gains made by the workers' movements of the post war era have been pushed back for several decades. The logic of the commodity has expanded its control over more of our lives, while its further reification[1] has immunised it from critical scrutiny.

Soon after Occupy Cork started it was noted in our local Workers Solidarity Movement branch discussions that the arguments for internal democracy we're used to having in campaigns wouldn't be as much of a preoccupation in this case. The Occupiers were, so to speak, "even more anarchist" than us in their conception of democracy; but the problem was that they didn't see this conception extending to the realm of economic production. Consequently we saw as one of our key tasks the promotion of the communist part of anarchist-communism. Like other anti-capitalists at the camp, I tried this in various ways: doing some talks and articles, bringing trade unionists and various left-wing and anti-capitalist academics and activists to speak, and in general conversations and discussions making radical arguments and pushing for a further development of the 99%/1% analysis. While the strategy did have some positive effects on the overall consciousness of the camp, it wasn't unproblematic, as radicals in many other camps have learned. Helena Sheehan in her essay, "Occupying Dublin: Considerations at a Crossroads", talked of the hostility against the "intellectual elite" of the camp, who she indicates were vaguely defined as "people who read books, write blogs, organise talks and articulate criticism"[2]. Similarly, other Occupy

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writings have talked about the divide that developed between the experienced activists and the newcomers to social movements. Of course radicals could arrogantly discount this as a manifestation of bourgeois liberalism, but we could obviously learn a lot more by subjecting our own political strategies, methodologies and theories to critical scrutiny. In that spirit of revolutionary praxis being a constant process of action and reflection, it is to the work of the great Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, that we will now turn.

Paulo Freire's Theoretical Framework

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire expands a dialectical understanding of oppression, *conscientização*, and liberation. (*Conscientização*, sometimes translated as conscientization, refers, to quote Freire's translator, to "learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality"[3]). Drawing on Marx's ontology of labour, Freire sees the ability to consciously and collectively shape one's environment and social relations as the defining feature of humanity[4]. Humankind has a vocation to become more fully human; oppression is what negates it. It is dehumanising for both oppressor and oppressed, but it is the oppressed that must engage in the revolutionary praxis or "gesture of love"[5] necessary to return the humanity to both (although the oppressors are unlikely to see it that way). On first glance some may feel the oppressor/oppressed dichotomy is far too simplistic for the contemporary West and much more applicable to the conditions of mass poverty and illiteracy of the global south where Freire worked. But this objection misses the point. Freire isn't making an empirical observation that the world is unambiguously divided into two homogeneous groups; he is rather expanding a dialectical theoretical framework for understanding oppression. And neither is he projecting a total innocence onto the oppressed. Instead he talks of how the oppressed can become sub-oppressors, and of the need to eject the oppressor within because it is from them that we get our model of humanity. To see the contemporary relevance here one need only look back at the mawkish reaction to the recent death of Steve Jobs, a man who was responsible for factory conditions that have driven many workers to suicide[6], and who, according to his biographer, was an all-round boorish bully (who even constantly parked in disabled parking spaces!).

Revolutionary leadership plays an important part in aiding conscientization; but how Freire defines the role of these revolutionaries has far more in common with the anarchist conception of the Leadership of Ideas than with the Leninist vanguard.[7] Unlike Lenin's assertion that peasants can't be trusted and that workers by themselves can only develop a trade union consciousness; for Freire a lack of confidence in people's ability to think and reason is incompatible with mutually achieving liberation. Likewise, talk of winning the people over to our side "does not belong in the vocabulary of revolutionary leaders, but in that of the oppressor"[8]. Instead dialogical engagement is aimed at achieving their adherence to liberation – an important distinction for how we construct and adapt radical theoretical work and political strategies. In the praxis of liberation – "the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it"[9] – arguments based on authority are no longer valid. Accordingly, that there are inherent con-

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traditions to the capitalist mode of production is not asserted as correct because Marx has shown it to be so. Rather, through collective dialogue, we critically investigate the logic of capital and those contradictions (a process for which Marx's work could of course be utilised). Since social reality is not static, our theory shouldn't be either; using Freire's methods, those who wish to transform social realities become theory's permanent re-creators.

Freirean Practice

Dialogue happens through a problem-posing pedagogical process, which Freire contrasts with what he calls the banking method of education. We are probably all familiar with the latter from school; it is where educators see their role as making deposits of information into ostensibly empty receptacles. In this method the students' role is to receive, file and store information – a role which prevents the development of critical consciousness. It's therefore a great shame that

"those who espouse the cause of liberation are themselves surrounded and influenced by the climate which generates the banking concept, and often do not perceive its true significance or its dehumanizing power. Paradoxically, then, they utilize this same instrument of alienation in what they consider an effort to liberate."[10]

For Freire the banking concept of education is, like sloganeering and propaganda, a tool of the oppressor. Liberatory education, on the other hand, is practiced through the problem-posing method. Instead of transferrals of information, it consists of acts of cognition between teacher/students and student/teachers. Together the group "cognize cognizable objects" or "decode codifications" – both terms basically mean the teacher/student facilitates a group critical analysis of some aspect of social reality. The codifications or cognizable objects could be visual aids like pictures, or orally presented existential problems. Freire warns that overly explicit codifications risk degeneration into propaganda – so it's best not to explore the capital-labour contradiction with an image of a capitalist with a cigar



and a top hat. Conversely, if they're too enigmatic the process may become a guessing game.

Before this happens, the teacher/students engage in "thematic investigation" – the process of understanding how people in a certain group look at the world and construct their thought. This is the section of the book that most strongly bears the imprint of the context in which it was written – the imagery is of white middle class Brazilians going to indigenous peasant communities with notebooks. Still, it is vitally important in all contexts of social change as "[o]ne cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding." [11]

Freire's use of the word respect should not be interpreted as a form of cultural relativism, rather it means that the people's thematic universe, their understanding of the social relations they live under, is the starting point in the problem-posing pedagogical process which aims to unveil the oppressive elements of those relations. Most radicals in their organising already apply some knowledge of their informal or subconscious thematic investigations – for example most of us would probably make arguments at a trade union meeting slightly differently than we would at a student council – but being more cognizant of what we're doing here is vitally important as it helps us avoid the twin perils of either alienating people with metaphors and themes that don't connect with their reality, or instead watering down our political arguments for fear of them being alienating.

Pedagogy of Postmodern Capitalism

And now to ask ourselves what a Freirean problem-posing workshop, aimed at beginning a process of understanding contemporary capitalism, would look like in an Occupy-type milieu. Even the most cursory thematic investigation would reveal that Marx's factory metaphor [12] is not the smartest place to start. Neither, I would say, is the worker-boss relation put in a broader context. Firstly because there doesn't exist anything close to a homogeneous experience of the production side of capitalism amongst the Occupy milieu, and secondly, and more generally, because of the changes in the surface appearance of capitalism in the last 4 decades – changes that far too many revolutionary groups seem to ignore in their literature. That is not to claim that the laws of capital accumulation are now different than before, just that the surface appearances and contemporary forms of capitalism are important to take into account in order for our analysis to resonate – or, to put in Freirean terms, these appearances form part of the thematic universe of people's understanding of the social relations they live under. The new spirit of capitalism, writes Slavoj Zizek, "triumphantly recuperated the egalitarian and anti-hierarchical rhetoric of 1968, presenting itself as a successful libertarian revolt against the oppressive social organizations characteristic of both corporate capitalism and Really Existing Socialism – a new libertarian spirit epitomized by dressed-down 'cool' capitalists such as Bill Gates and the founders of Ben and Jerry's ice-cream." [13] This ostensibly non-exploitative capitalism is epitomized in such products as Fairtrade coffee. The Fairtrade epithet is a *de facto* admission that trade under the normal laws of capitalism is unfair. But in line with the "add more free market" genre of politics, "fairness" becomes a commodity that Western consumers can pay more for, if

they so desire. Thus redemption for just being a consumer is found in the very act of commodity consumption. I see it as a postmodern example of how oppression is mythicized in order for it to be concealed. Given that "problem-posing pedagogy sets itself the task of demythologizing" [14], and that the myths of ethical consumption are very much part of all our thematic universes, I would argue that a bag of fairtrade coffee is an ideal codification to start the conscientization process.

As the cognizing process is nothing if not a dialogical relation between co-investigators, it's impossible to predict its course. Starting, for example, with a discussion of the "coffee karma" PR on the package may lead in any number of directions. However if the task is to unveil capitalist exploitation being masked with an ethical branding, the teacher/student needs to be prepared. Therefore here, from my solely literary interaction with Freire's methods, are what I would see as some of the key problems to pose in order to aid the process:

Do all the workers involved in this coffee get 'fairly traded' with? What about the workers that made the plane that flew it over here? And the workers that made the shelf on which it sits in the supermarket? Aren't they also subject to the same 'normal trade' or 'unfair trade' that ordinarily makes coffee pickers wages so low? What makes normal trade unfair? Are consumer choices a useful way to effect change? Is it a fair way? If we're voting with our euros, who gets more votes? Who gets more power? If our power isn't in our pockets, where is it? If we can choose between fairly and unfairly traded coffee, why can't we also choose chattel slave picked coffee? Should it be consumers' responsibility to ensure coffee pickers get fairly paid? Do consumers have the information necessary to make such choices with everything they purchase? Would that ever be possible? What other products are also commonly labelled fairtrade? What do they all have in common? What are people usually doing when they consume these products? If there were fairtrade plain black socks, would anyone buy them? In the nineties there was lots of discussion of the sweatshop conditions runners were made under, why do you think there aren't fairtrade versions of them sitting alongside the unfair trade ones in every sports shop? If you can't afford fairtrade coffee, are you being unethical? What's the emotional experience of seeing the smiling farmer on the package of coffee? Is it fair that this farmers' livelihood and happiness depend on the whims of Western consumers? What would be a truly fair situation for the farmer?

Obviously such questions are only suggestions; it would be the dialogue that would guide the collective decoding. And the teachers are also students, so what is actually unveiled might be quite different to what was originally considered problematic. In any case it's not difficult to see how such workshops would help develop better understandings of the reified capitalist mode of production we live under. Freire's methods could be seen as a cognitive application of the "learn by doing" principal. Just as no one would feel they know how to brew beer until they actually use their homebrew kit, in the same way, we don't critically engage with ideas until we actually do the thinking that conceptualises them.

Conclusion

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire tells a story of a group of armed peasants who planned to

take over a latifundium, but couldn't find a single volunteer to guard the owner they planned to keep hostage. It was an example of the magical beliefs in the invulnerability and power of the oppressor that Freire commonly found amongst the peasants of Brazil. At Occupy we witnessed similar magical beliefs in, for example, vast international conspiracies, spiritually transcending social reality, and the possibility of creating a local ethical capitalism. That many left Occupy with as fragmentary an understanding of capitalism that they entered with, and, sometimes, bad impressions of "know-it-all activists" [15], shows the need for revolutionaries to alter their often ineffective approaches to conscientization. For this, Freire's dialogical pedagogy offers a robust and insightful framework from which to develop more attuned methods of engagement in social movements.



[1] Reification refers to how the constructed social relations of capitalism appear as objective natural laws of civilization.

[2] Helana Sheehan, "Occupying Dublin: Considerations at a crossroads", <http://www.irishleftreview.org/2012/01/19/occupying-dublin-consideration....>

[3] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (Penguin, 1996) pp.17.

[4] To quote Marx: 'A spider constructs operations that resemble that of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects in reality.'

[5] Freire, pp.38.

[6] After 19 suicide attempts in two years, one factory installed suicide nets to catch the jumpers. A former Apple executive has even admitted to the *New York Times*, 'most people would still be really disturbed if they say where their iPhone comes from'. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2092277/Apple-Poor-working-conditions-inside-Chinese-factories-making-iPads.html>

[7] In fact, I don't see any practical incompatibility with the anarchist conception. In this Freire augments a major trend in Marxism which has seen several reformulations move the philosophy ever closer to anarchism. Todd May in chapter 2 of *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* details how this trend develops from Luxembourg to Lukacs, to the Frankfurt school critical theorists, to Althusser, to the autonomists, and finally to Cornelius Castoriadis.

[8] Freire, pp.76.

[9] Freire. pp.60.

[10] Freire, pp.60.

[11] [11] Freire, pp.76.

[12] Meaning the way Marx saw the factory as the ideal metaphor for the social relations of capitalism.

[13] Slavoj Zizek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (Verso 2009) pp.76. Emphasis in original.

[14] Freire, pp.64.

[15] To quote a Facebook argument I had with an Occupy Cork friend who was quite taken by the prevalent and highly questionable Freeman of the Land ideas.

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Authoritarianism and the early Irish State

In the first part of this article, carried in the the previous edition of IAR, Fin Dwyer looked at the foundation of the Free State, the suppression of political opposition and the workers movement. In this article, he looks at the period of Ireland's first post-independence government, Cumann na nGaedhael, as state and church moved on to attack and discipline women and any other groups seen to deviate from their vision of Catholic-Irish morality.

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In the mid 1920's, the Minister for External Affairs, Kevin O'Higgins, had become the Cumann na nGaedhael government's key political influence. At the time, the Catholic Church effectively formed the social policy of the Free State. This had little to do specifically with Cumann na nGaedhael and more to do with the fact that the Catholic Church was arguably the most powerful institution in Ireland in 1923, even more powerful than the state itself. Cumann na nGaedhael were in no position to stand up to the church, but had little inclination to do so either. Indeed, the Catholic Church had been the key influence on Irish society since before the famine and the entire nationalist movement of all sides had been inculcated with its moral and cultural attitudes, as were large sections of the population.

In this context, the social values of the church were effectively the values of Cumann na nGaedhael, highlighted best by W.T. Cosgrave, the president, who suggested that the upper house in the Free State could be a "theological board which would decide whether any enactments of the Dáil were contrary to [Roman Catholic] faith and morals or not" Indeed, Kevin O'Higgins himself had failed in an attempt to become a priest. Rather than one influencing the other, both church and state became almost inseparable and at times indistinguishable on social policy.

Once in power, Cumann na nGaedhael soon set about trying to implement as policy what were Catholic social values. There was no debate on these issues, they were enforced regardless of their impact. This was to have disastrous consequences particularly for women as, when fused

with Cumann na nGaedhael's authoritarianism, Catholic views of women would see them slowly but surely excluded and denuded of power. Usually this was due to legislative change, but also on some occasions more forceful methods were used when they deemed it necessary.

Attitudes towards Women

The Catholic Church had a deeply sexist view of women in society. As the sociologist Tom Inglis (1998) points out, they portrayed women as "fragile, weak beings" and "for women to attain and maintain moral power it was necessary that they retain their virtue and chastity." In order to enforce these attitudes, the church portrayed sex as unclean and immoral and ultimately, women's bodies were something to be ashamed of.

This helped generate a deep embarrassment and guilt over sex. Where the church had substantial influence they could effectively control women's knowledge of sex, as the only place they could talk about it was in confession, where they were berated over the topic by their priest. Outside of this, the Catholic point of view on women's role in society was that they were to rear children, take care of the family and do little else.

The Nationalist movement in Ireland had been heavily influenced by these ideas and attitudes, and its formula of an ideal Irish woman was almost identical. Arthur Griffith, who had died in 1922, had stated that in any Irish house, "you will meet the ideal mother, modest, hospitable,

religious, absorbed in her children and motherly duties," clearly reflecting the ethos of the church.

The reality of 1920's Ireland

In spite of the significant influence of the church, the reality of life in Ireland in 1922 was quite different. Prior to independence, the church had used its not inconsiderable social and cultural weight to enforce these ideas. However, Ireland like many countries across Europe in the period between 1914-23, witnessed great social change, which undermined the church's control and authority. While women were by no means equal citizens, significant progress had been made.

"The Catholic Church had been the key influence on Irish society since before the famine and the entire nationalist movement of all sides had been inculcated with its moral and cultural attitudes, as were large sections of the population."

However, after independence, the church did not only have to rely on its moral, social and cultural influence. Now, in unison with the authoritarian Cumann na nGaedhael government, it could use the apparatus of state to enforce its authority over women, particularly when it came to sex.

Sex

It was around the issue of sex that the church were most vocal and outraged. They viewed sex as a dirty subject and a sphere where women were largely a corrupting influence. However, in relation to sex, by 1923, Irish women may not have been as ashamed and prudish as the church believed they should have been (or as many today assume them to have been). In 1924, an Inter-Departmental Committee of Inquiry regarding Venereal Disease was tasked to 'make inquiries as to the steps necessary, if any, which are desirable to secure that the extent of venereal disease may be diminished'. In its unpublished report, they concluded that

'venereal disease was widespread throughout the country, and that it was disseminated largely by a class of girl who could not be regarded as a prostitute.' The report also illustrated that the spread of disease was relatively evenly distributed across the country, and not limited, as anticipated, to former garrison towns and cities.

Aside from the blatant sexism of the report, which attributed the spread of venereal disease to women, it clearly indicated a higher level of sexual activity at the time than is often imagined. For the state and its moral watchdog, the Catholic Church, this was seen as a great danger to the church's authority and control, and to the nationalist vision of what womanhood was, i.e., a home-maker.

To combat this, the authoritarianism of the state went into overdrive to suppress sexual activity. In 1923, strict censorship in film was introduced and films which were deemed 'indecent, obscene or blasphemous or contrary to ... or subversive of public morality' were banned. 1924 saw the restrictions placed on the sale of alcohol, not least as it was seen as one of the causes of slipping morality.

By 1929, censorship bills enabled the government to ban even the dissemination of material on birth control. Aside from their moral view on birth control, it was clearly something that allowed women to gain greater control over sex, while society in general would have a greater understanding of the sexual process. This was anathema to the Catholic Church's teaching and practice. The attitude toward contraception articulated just how domineering the Free State was – even discussion on the topic was not going to be tolerated. The Minister for Justice, James FitzGerald-Kenney (Kevin O'Higgins was assassinated in 1927), stated in 1928, when the censorship bill was debated in the Dáil:

"In our [the government's] views on [contraception] we are perfectly clear and perfectly definite. We will not allow ... the free discussion of this question ... We have made up our minds that it is wrong. That conclusion is for us unalterable ... We consider it to be a matter of grave importance. We have decided, call it dogmatically if you like - and I believe almost all persons in this country are in agreement with us - that that question shall not be freely and openly discussed. That question shall not be advocated in any book or in any periodical which circulates in this country."

This attitude towards sex and the setting of unattainable standards for women was also to lead to horrific abuse of women on a level that is only becoming really understood in the last decade. This culture allowed women who had children outside of marriage, who were raped and spoke of their experience, or even just assertive women, to be committed into what were effectively prisons run by Catholic nuns. These were the brutal Magdalene Laundries. The state's attitude to this was more than supportive. In 1927, The State Commission on the Destitute Poor referred to women who had children outside of marriage as either "first time offenders" or those "who had fallen more than once." For single mothers who managed to hold on to their children (often they were forced to give them up for adoption), they mostly did so under conditions of exclusion and impoverishment. This led to a shameful infant mortality rate of 33% for children of single mothers.

Prostitution

Perhaps the most direct attack on women over the issue of sex came in 1925, when the state cracked down on prostitution. The prostitute embodied the polar opposite to both the Catholic Church's and the nationalist view of women. Before independence, Dublin had had a world famous red light district in the North Inner city, known as the "Monto", based around Montgomery street. Although it went into decline after the withdrawal of the British Army, hundreds of women still worked as prostitutes. Everything about the Monto horrified the church, not only was it "immoral" but they had little or no control over the sex lives of the women working there.

Prostitutes in the Monto

The Monto was also to a certain extent outside the patriarchal structure of Irish society, given many of the brothels were run by women. Nonetheless, for the women working there, it was a very tough life, where they were controlled by madams or pimps. Unfortunately, when the church and state attacked the area in the 1920's, they did not have these women's interests at heart. They were concerned with ridding Dublin of a moral scourge as they saw it, rather than helping people who were being exploited.

Campaigning against the Monto had begun in the early 1920's, firstly by church organisations. Led by a group who would form the Legion of Mary in 1925, Catholic activists targeted the area, attempting to literally force the prostitutes to convert from prostitution to home-makers. They operated hostels where former prostitutes could stay, although they were operated under strict moral guidelines, including the issue that "every entrant is made the object of a special and individual attention, directed in the first place to the creation of moral fibre." Once a brothel was closed, they moved a family into the building, effectively ensuring that the prostitutes would be made homeless unless they stayed with the church-run hostels.

It was clear that the interests of these women were not being taken into account, but rather more abstract notions of Catholic moral fibre. Frank Duff, who was most synonymous with this campaign against prostitution, and is often lauded as a great social reformer, illustrated the thinking behind this deeply sexist "moral fibre". For Duff, "the only cause of Syphilis ... is the prostitute lying in wait in cities to tempt men." In light of the findings of the 1926 Committee of Inquiry regarding Venereal Disease Ireland, such statements were completely unfounded, but were indicative of Duff's prejudices and disregard for these women.

To "save" these women, they were inculcated with the state and church's idea of what they should be – essentially wives and mothers. The move from prostitution gave these women no more power, as it was a simple process of replacing the brothel madam with a husband; through the hostels, the Catholic activists married off the women off as quickly as possible. Between 1922-23, sixty-one women were married off.

This campaign, where these supposedly "saved" women were bystanders in their "liberation"

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from prostitution, was heavily supported by the state. The first hostel was opened at 76 Harcourt Street, a building given to them in 1922 by future president and then Minister for Local Government, W.T. Cosgrave.

After campaigning for a few years in 1925, the campaign against the prostitutes in the Monto was stepped up a notch. Several arms of the church, including the Jesuits and the Legion of Mary, worked with the police in driving prostitutes out of the Monto. After the church organisations' moderate success early in the year, the police launched a series of raids on the Monto. In March, over one hundred people were arrested and one woman was imprisoned for 6 weeks for allowing a house to be used as a brothel. Needless to say, while the church and state succeeded in closing the Monto, they did not end prostitution. This was a secondary concern; the campaign was mainly about moral aesthetics, no doubt prompted by the fact that as the Catholics left the Pro-Cathedral on Marlborough Street in Dublin, they were on the fringe of a red light district.

Child Abuse and The Carrigan Report

The long-term ramifications of authoritarian attitudes fused with the church's morality, which created an environment where sex was something unspeakable, had horrendous consequences. When a report was carried out into sexual crimes in Ireland - The Carrigan Report (1930) - it uncovered widespread sexual abuse of children.

In the report, Eoin O'Duffy, the chief of police, stated there had been thousands of cases of abuse of people under 18 (some under 11) between 1927 and 1929, for which only 15% of the cases had been prosecuted. Immediately one is reminded of the 1916 proclamation's most modest of demands of "cherishing all children of the nation equally". These notions were long dead by 1930 - the report was never published or acted upon. When it was circulated to politicians on December 2nd 1931, the Department of Justice attached a cover note arguing against publication because

"The culture created by the all-encompassing authoritarianism became endemic in Irish politics for decades, leading many Irish people into self-imposed exile."



"it might not be wise to give currency to the damaging allegations made in Carrigan regarding the standard of morality in the country." This policy was continued when Fianna Fail came to power the following year, and the report was buried. The long-term implications of this are really only being understood today, as the true extent of child sex abuse emerges. As Fiona Kennedy (2000) pointed out, had this report been published it may not have stopped all sex abuse, but certainly the culture of silence that allowed perpetrators abuse children for decades would have been lessened.

Women and Wider Society

Accompanying the campaigning around the issue of sex, the church and state through the 1920's brought in several pieces of legislation designed to force women from the workplace into the home and keep them there.

In 1925, divorce - something that was already something very difficult to attain - was banned for women. Technically, it was possible for men if they moved to a country where divorce was legal, but this provision was not open to women. The only option available was legal separation, but no remarriage. When debated in the Senate, the Countess of Desart noted the implications of this bill for women, who could be legally separated but not able to remarry:

"You condemn her to a life of misery or isolation, for a woman in so false a position must be ten times more circumspect than any other, if she would safeguard her good name. If guilty, she must spend the rest of her days as an example of the wicked, flourishing like a bay tree or as an eyesore in a land hitherto famed for its high ideals of purity."

Countess Desart was right, but unfortunately this was one of the intentions of the bill; in order to preserve the family, women would be prevented from taking independent action in terms of divorce or separation. This legislation, reflecting the desire to control women as home makers, was reinforced in the provision in the bill which legally made a woman's legal residence

"Leitrim in the early 1920's had been like a lot of the country. It was the site of much republican activity and class struggle."

that of her husband, even if he lived in a different continent.

Another crucial aspect of controlling women and enforcing the catholic view of the family was the exclusion of women from public life. In 1924, Kevin O'Higgins first attempted to exclude women totally from jury duty. This was clearly unconstitutional, as the 1922 constitution enshrined the idea that all citizens were equal. When it was finally brought in 1927, O'Higgins, a few months from his assassination, had found a way around equality: women would have to register for jury duty.

In the course of the debate in the Seanad, O'Higgins outlined how he saw women: "I think we take the line that it was proper to confer on women citizens all the privileges of citizenship and such of the duties of citizenship as we thought it reasonable to impose upon them." This idea, that women had limited capabilities and were unable to bear the weight of citizenship, was very much to the fore of their thinking and directed policy. This shaped the overriding aim: the removal of women from the public sphere.

Women working outside the home was something the Catholic Church loathed. In 1925, the government attempted to limit posts in the Senior Civil Service to men, but this was rejected in the Senate. A few years later, the bill was forced through, as the Senate could only reject legislation for a certain time period. Women were thus banned from progressing past a certain grade, thereby making a successful career in the civil service impossible. In time, a marriage bar would be introduced, forcing women to retire from the civil service when they married.

General Society

By the late twenties, the Catholic Church and the Free State alliance had almost total control over the social life of the vast majority of people. Any threat to this, no matter how inconsequential, was treated in the harshest of terms. The level of authoritarianism ruling Irish society was illustrated in Leitrim in the early 1930's.

Leitrim in the early 1920's had been like a lot of the country. It was the site of much republican activity and class struggle. In 1921, an Irish emigrant, Jimmy Gralton, returned from New York and got involved in local organising of tenants taking over landlords' farms. In the 1920's, he was very much seen to the left of the political spectrum, making enemies amongst the estab-

ishment in the area. In 1922, Gralton lead the building of a local community Hall – the Pearse-Connolly Hall - where educational classes and dances were held. This immediately irked the local Catholic Church as Gralton was challenging their control over social activities normally held in a church-run parish hall. Through the 1920’s, the Catholic Church vented much of its moral indignation at such dance halls and accused them of being sites of debauchery which caused alcoholism and sex outside marriage. In 1930, the local priest began a sustained campaign against Gralton’s Pearse-Connolly Hall. This lead to physical attacks on the hall which was eventually burned down in December 1932 most likely by the local IRA.

Not happy with this, the church, just like in the attack on the Monto in 1925, was able to rely on the state for support, but their reaction was almost incredulous. For what was comparatively low-level activity, Jimmy Gralton, a man born in rural Leitrim, was deported to America and exiled from Ireland. There’s little doubt that Gralton could have been dispensed in more brutal ways - for example in 1931 the republican James Vaugh died in very mysterious circumstances in a police cell in Ballinamore, Co. Leitrim - but there can be little doubt that the deportation of Gralton was to serve as a lesson to others.

Indeed, Gralton’s case highlighted just how much control the church-state alliance had over all aspects of society, including the media. The Irish Times reporting on Gralton’s extradition emphasised the fact that Gralton was an “Irish American”, which he was not – he had spent some time in America as an emigrant, where he also became a US citizen. This masked the fact that the Irish State was deporting someone who was born in the state.

This lie was repeated in the several articles in the Irish Times during March, when Gralton’s deportation order was delivered. Finally, in August 1933, when Gralton was deported to the USA, he was called “a returned American”, and the only crime cited was that he supposedly held “extreme communistic views”. No article in the Irish Times raises any issue about the right to deport him, indeed it clearly shirked from challenging the state by frequently and erroneously saying that Gralton was an Irish-American.

It reflects the authoritarian nature of the Free State which was increasingly identifying what it was to be Irish with the moral, ethical and social values of its political and religious elite. As Gralton’s case illustrated, they would ruthlessly persecute anyone who questioned this.

The authoritarianism that shaped the first ten years deeply shaped Ireland far into the future. In 1932, a faction of the Republican movement defeated in the Civil War, Fianna Fail, won the election and replaced Cumann na nGaedheal as government. (5 years earlier, lead by Eamon de Valera, they had broken with the IRA and had formed a new party). The transition was largely seamless, with Fianna Fail largely continuing in a similar vein to Cumann na nGaedhael.

It is hard to tell how much they naturally shared the authoritarian views of Cumann na nGaedhael, or whether they replicated what they saw as a successful model of taking and keeping power, but they proved more than able to build on Cumann na nGaedhael’s authoritarian foundation.

Indeed, it was Fianna Fail who ensured the

Carrigan report detailing child abuse was not published or acted upon. It was they who would deported Jimmy Gralton at the behest of the Catholic Church, and most all, it was they who delivered a coup de grace of 15 years of conservative laws, formally incorporating the attacks on women in a deeply chauvinistic document that was supposed to outline what it meant to be Irish – the 1937 constitution.

The culture created by the all-encompassing authoritarianism became endemic in Irish politics for decades, leading many Irish people into self-imposed exile. Publishing anything that disagreed with the Catholic Nationalist ethos was next to impossible. This produced what can only be described as a stifling monolithic culture, where nothing in any way challenging was tolerated. By 1923, after W.B. Yeats was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, the award received the following stinging criticism from “The Catholic Bulletin” as “...a substantial sum provided by a deceased anti-christian manufacturer of dynamite.”

It is little surprise then that the more creative-minded followed the urban and rural poor into what was often miserable emigration. This would prompt Samuel Beckett in his 1956 play, “All that Fall”, to reflect: “It is suicide to be abroad but what is it to be at home? [...] A lingering dissolution”

Over 40 years later, in his emigration song, “Thousands are Sailing”, Philip Chevron could still write:
“Where e’er we go, we celebrate,
The land that makes us refugees,
From fear of priests with empty plates,
From guilt and weeping effigies”

Conclusion

When looking at The Free State there is little to take from its first ten years, or indeed, subsequent governments. Most praise comes when historians use “the litmus test” of “the survival of the state”, as Thomas Bartlett did, as recently as 2010. While they were successful ensuring the state survived (whatever that actually means, given they simply replicated the administrative practices of the British Empire), for the vast majority – women, the rural and urban poor, and political opponents - this meant effective removal from an active role in society, a role that they had fought hard to achieve between 1913-22.

From legislation making public life for women impossible, to the deportation of Jimmy Gralton, the achievements of “The Free State” were limited to the restoration of the pre-World War I social and economic order. They succeeded in preserving a state for the rich and powerful, in a symbiotic relationship with the Catholic Church. In this context, those who laud the “achievements” of the founders of the Irish State as great men, for no obvious reason other than the preservation of this state, should reflect on the words of Mikhail Bakunin, the 19th century Russian anarchist.

“Thus, to offend, to oppress, to despoil, to plunder, to assassinate or enslave one’s fellow man is ordinarily regarded as a crime. In public life, on the other hand, from the standpoint of patriotism, when these things are done for the greater glory of the State, for the preservation or the extension of its power, it is all transformed into duty and virtue. [...] There is no horror, no

cruelty, sacrilege, or perjury, no imposture, no infamous transaction, no cynical robbery, no bold plunder or shabby betrayal that has not been or is not daily being perpetrated by the representatives of the states, under no other pretext than those elastic words, so convenient and yet so terrible: “for reasons of state.””

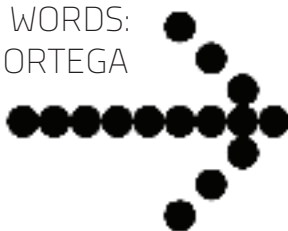




Sex and Sex Work from an Anarcha-Feminist perspective

There is an on-going debate within anarchism about sex work, feminism and sex in general. While there is general agreement on the difference between sexual freedom and sexual exploitation, there is conflict between anarchists who argue for decriminalisation and those with radical feminist tendencies who see sex work (or even sex in general) as violence against women. The latter are mainly influenced by Andrea Dworkin and Melissa Farley.

WORDS:
LETICIA ORTEGA



Anarcha-Feminism or Radical Feminism?

Dworkin's analysis of heterosexual sex and porn in her book *Intercourse* concludes that intercourse is a synonym for rape. She tries to clarify at the end that what she really means is that "sex must not put women in a subordinate position. It must be reciprocal and not an act of aggression from a man looking only to satisfy himself."

Melissa Farley, an academic left wing radical feminist, believes that the only feminist approach to sex work should be abolition. Farley has said that "If we view prostitution as violence against women, it makes no sense to legalize or decriminalize prostitution."

From an anarcha-feminist perspective, this approach is problematic. When radical feminists ('good' women) feel they have the privilege and the right to exercise power to force sex workers ('bad' women) to adapt to the dominant cultural norms with regard to sex, they are simply using the same tools that patriarchy has used historically in order to dictate the social norms that control the lives of women.

This poses several questions: what kind of feminist 'assists' other women without asking them what kind of assistance they really want? What kind of feminist 'assists' other women by treating them as if they were unable to decide for themselves what is best for them? What kind of feminist 'assists' other women with methods that these women believe in fact to be harmful?

"Sex is a commodity because as much as we like it or not, everything under capitalism tends towards commodification."

The Commodification of Sex

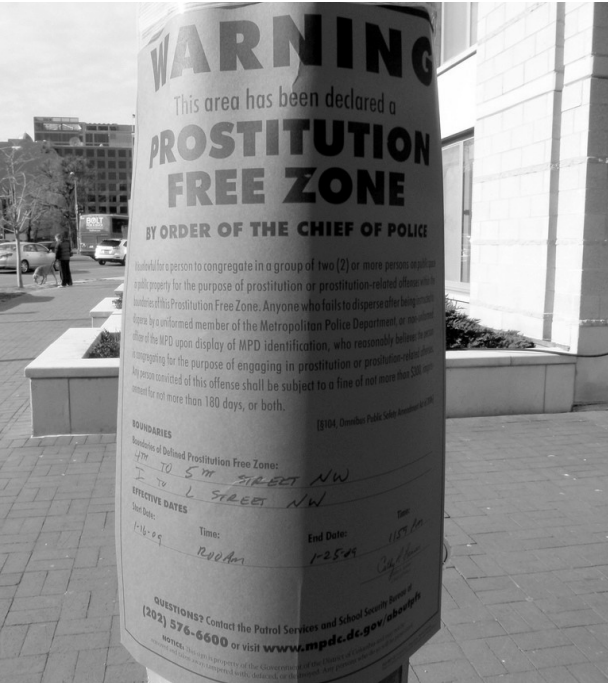
Sex work however, is more diverse and has many different fields than prostitution. A sex worker refers to any person who is paid to engage physically in a sexual way with clients: prostitutes, street workers, brothel workers, in-call or out-call workers, escorts, call boys, call girls, rent boys, bar girls, in-house prostitutes, adult film actors or actresses. Other sex workers are paid to engage in sexual performance directly or indirectly: exotic lap dancers, adult film producers, phone sex operators, nude models, full body masseuses, pimps, madams, strippers, escort service owners, webcam models, adult website owners.

“what kind of feminist ‘assists’ other women without asking them what kind of assistance they really want?”

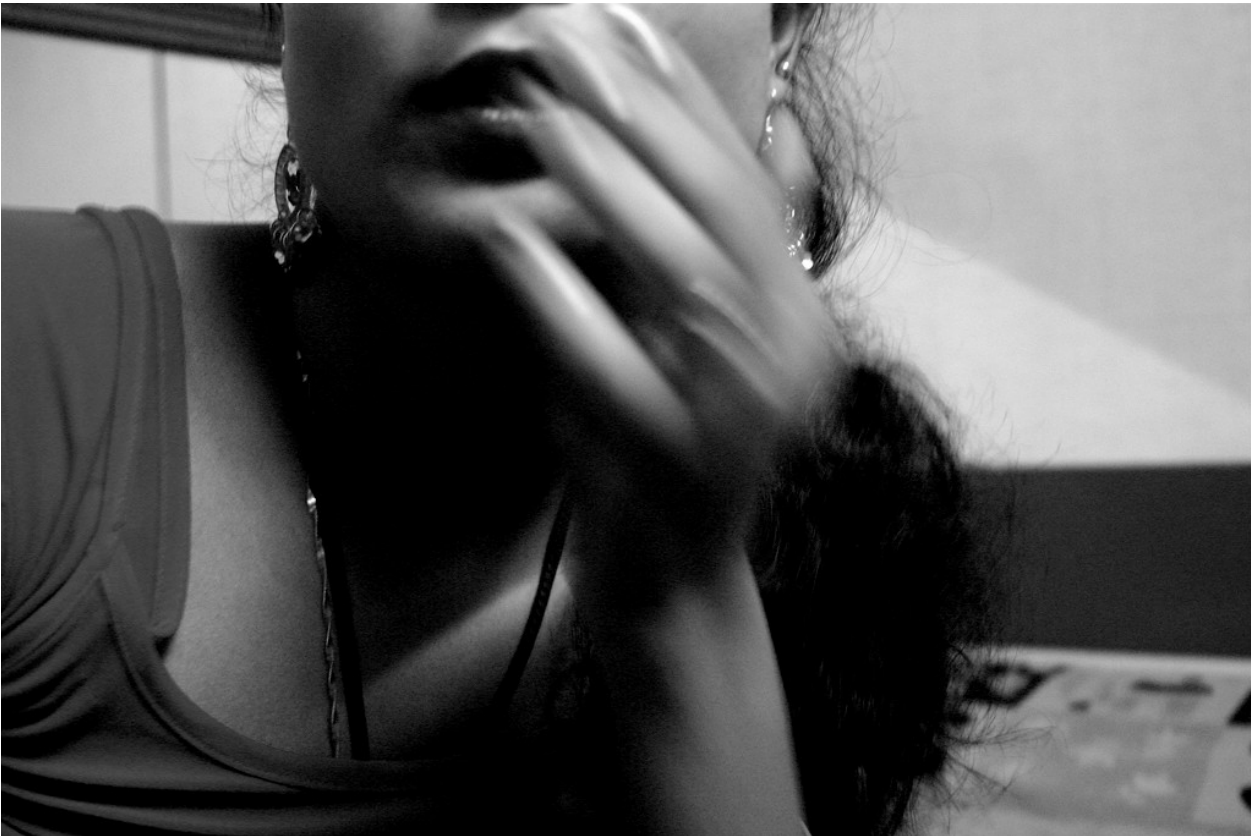
Sex is a commodity because as much as we like it or not, everything under capitalism tends towards commodification. I find that a lot of the anarchist arguments about sex in general are puritanical and conservative about our sexuality, rather than just seeing it as exploitative work. If we see all work to be exploitative, why is sex work different?

Class, Gender and Morality

For example, in Madrid there was a campaign to shut down a brothel a few years ago. I don’t know how many anarchists were involved in this action but a lot of my comrades thought it was a positive campaign. But what of the people who were working there who relied on that work for their income? What is the difference between this and people trying to shut down a supermarket where many workers who are also exploited will lose their jobs. Why should we have a different attitude?



There is a history of puritanical and conservative approaches in anarchism. There is the very famous scene of Emma Goldman being confronted for dancing with the lads by a comrade; and during the Spanish Revolution a lot of male CNT members believed that revolutionary anarcho-communists should live like nuns and monks for the spirit of the revolution.



Sex is still a big taboo in anarchist and left wing circles. People who choose to attack the brothel but not their local McDonalds do so because of sexual morality. Sex is made into a moral issue because we are not only taking about an economic relationship. So when some anarchists have a problem with a brothel or with a specific sex shop, it is not just a class or gender analysis that informs them, it is also what they think is morally good or bad for the rest of us.

Further Debate and New Approaches

Sex is a very big part of our lives. The anarchist attitude to sex and sexuality should be that sexual activities and relations should be safe, free, diverse and consensual; acknowledging that people are trans, queer, bi or hetero, from the monogamous to the polyamorous, from the asexual to the polysexual.

In relation to sex work, I also believe that anarcho-communist critiques of work, of legislation and of trade union structures have the potential to move forward the entrenched debate between those either advocating for the sex industry or fighting stigma, and those calling for its abolition through state legislation. I would like to see future discussions in anarchist circles of ways forward for grassroots organising by prostitutes and sex workers against their control by the state, the sex industry and the market.





Turn off the Red Light: Should we advocate it?

WORDS: TJ

The subject of prostitution is becoming part mainstream discourse again as a number of European countries look to legislate to curb demand, whereby the punter rather than the prostitute is criminalised. Ireland has also been looking to write this into law since the high profile campaign Turn off the Red Light (TORL) was launched.

The demand approach which TORL are advocating is an abolitionist approach to sex work. The aim of abolitionism is to end prostitution by criminalising those who profit from sex work, such as brothel owners or those who offer advertising space for prostitution businesses. This includes the method famously known as the Swedish Law or the demand approach, which is banning the purchase of sex, the idea being that the punter is criminalised and not the prostitute. Unfortunately in practice this is often not the case under abolitionist legal systems as prostitutes are regularly targeted. [1]

History of Abolitionism

Abolitionism has its origins in 19th Century Feminism; the term itself was borrowed from the campaign against the slave trade. At the time, abolitionism referred particularly to certain laws that were enacted in England and Wales in the 1860s. These laws were the Contagious Diseases Act. Under these laws any woman could be detained by the police and forced to undergo a medical examination for venereal diseases. This was to prevent the spread of venereal diseases at the time, in particular syphilis by registering and examining prostitutes. This approach was known as regulationism. [2]

The abolitionist movement was born out of protest against regulationism. Its leader, Josephine Butler, argued that women could never consent to prostitution and blamed men's unbridled lust. They created a coalition of groups, which included working men's organisations and religious organisations. They were also joined by the growing "social purity" movement, whose ideas of sexual chastity were more restrictive than Butler's. [3]

Once the act was repealed in 1886, this alliance turned their attention to "white slavery". They envisioned laws to target those who earned money from prostitution rather than prostitutes themselves. The abolitionist campaign in the end was overshadowed by the social purity campaign. Many feminists either founded or joined these campaigns but they always became over-run by social purity organisations, whose rela-

tionship to prostitutes was questionable. While professing sympathy for their situation of having fallen into the hands of "white slavers", they still condemned these women, whose risqué behavior was to blame for their situation. [4] These campaigns later turned into prohibitionist movements, which would make the act of prostitution illegal. [5]

Abolitionism Today

Abolitionism is still popular among feminists today. Its advocates argue that all prostitution is violence against women and that no consent is possible. All prostitutes are victims in the eyes of abolitionists. Melissa Farley, one of the most well-known abolitionists, once said that, "If you look at it, [prostitution is] paid rape. You're making them subservient during that time, so you're the dominant person. She has to do what you want." This claim is insulting, as it delegitimises rape survivors' and prostitutes' own experiences.

If one looks at feminist abolitionist material, they only ever speak of female prostitution and seem to ignore the existence of male and transgender variants as they do not fit into their analysis of prostitution being male sexual violence against women. That silence has the effect of marginalising those voices. This approach focuses far too much on the gender divide in sex work and simply reinforces the gendered nature of our society. They enshrine the idea that women who work in prostitution will always be victims, typically stating that they were victims of abuse before

going into the industry, suggesting that women enter sex work because they are psychologically damaged.

Who are Turn Off the Red Light?

One of the main proponents of TORL is an organisation called Ruhama, which was founded by the Good Shepherd Sisters and Our Lady of Charity Sisters, who both ran Magdalene Laundries and whose relationships with prostitutes were never the best. Other supporters include feminist groups such as the Irish Feminist Network and the Open Feminist Forum, along with trade unions and a range of NGOs. We can see history repeat itself again, as religious groups monopolise the movement. [6]

One cannot talk about sex work without talking about migration. Laura Maria Augustin discusses the rescue industry in her book "Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry". Migrant women who know they will work as sex workers are assigned victim status by the rescue industry, who deport them back to their own country or prevent them from working. Sex work is realistically one of the few forms of work which may be viable with precarious immigration status. [7]

These abolitionist laws help to build fortress walls around Europe that prevent migrants from coming in, while pretending they are doing it for the women's own good. Police are paid to watch sex workers, to find who their clients are and penalise them, but will also use this as a method to find out the legal status of migrant women. The rescue industry does not offer these women permits or viable alternatives to support themselves, especially considering that asylum seekers in this country are not allowed to work and have to live on €19.10 per week. In the view of the General Secretary of the Technical, Electrical and Engineering Union (TEEU), "prostitution could not be considered work." [8] If the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) follows this line then sex workers would not be entitled, in the eyes of the union movement, to the same rights that other workers enjoy. [9] The International Labour Organisation (ILO) to which ICTU is affiliated however, recognises that sex work is an industry and sex workers should have the same rights as other workers. [10]

The Swedish Law

The introduction of the Swedish Law would criminalise the purchase of sex but there are already stringent laws in place for prostitutes. Prostitution is legal in Ireland but several of the activities surrounding it are illegal. The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act of 1993 prohibits soliciting, living off the earning of prostitution and keeping a brothel. Advertising brothels and prostitution is prohibited by the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act of 1994. [11]

If we look at countries that have already introduced this law, it is clear that it doesn't work as intended. The police in Iceland have actually given up on fighting prostitution. They reported that "they neither had the funds nor the manpower to fight prostitution which they conclude is clearly thriving in Iceland in spite of it being illegal." [12] If one looks at the statistics for Norway

and Sweden, evidence shows that human trafficking for the sex trade has increased since the law was introduced. [13, 14] PION, a Norwegian sex workers organisation, gave a report on their own conclusions about the law and how it affects sex workers. They feel they have less rights and their privacy has been invaded. They give various examples, one of which is that their operations are revealed to landlords and hotels or that a woman's identity is revealed on purpose to the media when they carry out operations. Women are less likely to come forward to the authorities when they experience violence since the law was introduced. [15] These women are also driven away by police when they work on the streets accusing them of "[encouraging] criminal activity." [16] Even if clients see that the women are trafficked, they are unlikely to report this in fear that they will be prosecuted.

Another major problem is the rise of STI/STDs as sex workers in Norway prefer not to carry condoms or lubricants as this could be found by the police and used as evidence against them for selling sex. Since the new law has been introduced the number of punters has decreased, but punters have more bargaining power demanding services such as unprotected sex. [17]

Decriminalisation

Decriminalisation is the approach which is advocated by most sex workers and human rights groups. This approach means that prostitution is not included in the criminal code, but would be regulated in other ways either at provincial, state, federal or local level. It would be treated like any other business and subject to employment laws, health and safety and zoning laws. This would mean that brothels would be subject to safety code standards, which would create a safer working environment.

Decriminalisation is the best legal approach to sex work in our current system as it destigmatises it, and removes the threat of arrest and police interference for sex workers and others involved. It also deems it as a legitimate business, which means workers have a legal framework to work with if they are treated unfairly, especially when they experience violence. It is however a reformist measure that does not tackle the problems of undocumented migrants working in the industry, who are still left in the same position. It also still leaves sex work community members subject to drug-related and loitering laws.

New Zealand was the first country to introduce decriminalisation. The law only passed by one vote when it went through parliament. It has decriminalised all forms of prostitution including street prostitution. There have been several improvements since the law has been introduced. The number of women working in the industry has not risen, prostitutes feel more comfortable to report violence, especially prostitutes working on the street, and their dealings with the police has improved in general, with more of them willing to work with the sex industry rather than against it. [18]

Looking at all of these examples, one thing is clear; we need to lift stigmatisation if we are to move forward and part of that is to stand in solidarity with sex workers. Work is always going to be exploitative under capitalism and so sex will always be subject to commodification and exploi-

tation. One Wobbly sex worker put it the best: "Fighting sex work instead of fighting capitalism and patriarchy does not address the exploitation in its entirety." [19]



[1] Melissa Hope Ditmore, 2006. Encyclopedia of Prostitution and Sex Work [Two Volumes] [2 Volumes]: Encyclopedia of Prostitution and Sex Work (2 Volumes Set). Edition. Greenwood. [18] [19]

[2-5] ibid

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.....**The Irish Anarchist Review**

Mentioning the War:
Essays and Reviews
1999-2011 by Kevin Higgins

WORDS: KEVIN DOYLE



Kevin Higgins is a poet from Galway and a long-standing contributor to the independent left publication Red Banner Magazine. A former member of the Militant Tendency (now the Socialist Party), he has played no small part in making the world of writing a more accessible and pleasant place to be in this country – not least for those who don’t normally find themselves welcome in the hallowed, middle class halls of Literativille.

His approach is no accident. Higgins knows that good writing can be found anywhere and is not the preserve of the privileged or the best educated. But importantly too in terms of writing (and poetry in particular) he is committed to high standards. ‘Political poetry’ with little poetry in it, as well as doggerel in general, are two of his bête noires.

His poetry should be treasured on the left (but it isn’t of course) in particular because we have so few poets who cherish the streets we wander along. Dave Lordan or Diarmuid O’ Dalaigh in Cork might appear to fit that role too, but their concerns in the main are with the world outside the left. Higgins in contrast often looks in at where we are and there is much that is valuable and sobering in what he sees.

His poetry I recommend highly but his essays, collected here by Salmon Poetry, are much more of a mixed bag. One problem to be pointed out at the outset is that a fair number of his reviews (mostly attributed to The Galway Advertiser) are simply too short

to be of much value. I am all for brevity but with many of these, interesting points are raised only to be left hanging in their entirety at conclusion of said review. A case in point being that of Lorna Siggins’ *Once Upon A Time In The West* which is strangely equivocal. As I said, it would be interesting to know more about Kevin Higgins thinks about the significant yet tragically defeated protest centred on the Corrib gas fields.

When Kevin does have space to elaborate, he is invariably interesting and informative. He is good at explaining and is always interesting and clear when writing about literature and poetry. This is a real asset and rarer than you might imagine. Not surprisingly his way with words is one of his strongest suits. Generally he is even handed (see his review of Michael D’s last collection of poems) but he can be ruthless too, as with his hilarious review of Ruairí Quinn’s *Straight Left – A Journey Into Politics*. Such an opus was bound to provoke Kevin Higgin’s ire and it sure does. Among many fitting observations about the Labour Party’s ultimate clown is the comment that Quinn “as a writer is dull beyond belief”.

Since this collection has been reviewed elsewhere by general left commentators I will focus for the remainder on what anarchists and libertarian socialists might find interesting. On the positive side Kevin is one of the few socialists who is prepared to face up to the authoritarianism (some call it the Leninist or Stalinist mindset) that is, even now, a significant feature of the serious left, both here and abroad. This is big plus for me.

The disaster that befell us all when the idea of socialism became inextricably linked to censorship, the Gulags, show trials, self-criticism sessions and so on and so forth (stand up Lenin, Trotsky and the others), is too easily glossed over by many within the Marxist left. Some don’t see the huge problem even now or imagine it to be some past aberration or some plot by the CIA to denigrate our ultimate goal. Not Kevin Higgins, I feel. He knows, as many of us do to our cost (I came across it myself only recently in the Anti-Household Tax Campaign) that

the toxic world of authoritarian left politics is still very real and debilitating.

On the negative side, Kevin is just a bit too prone to lampooning the left, in contexts that are often not clear. Some of this, I am guessing, is scar tissue from his Militant Tendency days, but often the swipes are too easy and undiscerning. They are to be found here and there in this collection but an example is his observation about a speaker at a left meeting who was ‘earnest but dead-in-the-mouth’.

Of course this could well be true (and who hasn’t been at such meetings?) but the problem is that there’s loads of mundanity in trying to organise even the smallest of protests. Our resources are almost pitiful when compared against those ranged against us, and I just wonder, in places, where the empathy is for the countless individuals who have been the foot-soldiers of important (and un-newsworthy) protests – against deportations, against the household tax, for choice around pregnancy termination?

Anarchists will find much of interest in this collection but there will be dissatisfaction too. Like many from within the Marxist tradition, Kevin Higgins shows much insight into the problems of the authoritarian left. But more searching scrutiny is not developed here.

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Title: Mentioning the War: Essays and Reviews
1999-2011
Author: Kevin Higgins
Publisher: Salmon Poetry

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Photograph: Kevin Higgins and anti-apartheid activist, Nimrod Sejake, at a meeting organised by the Militant Tendency in the late 80s. Provided by the author.



Brave New North: Neoliberalism in the Six Counties

Today, the core assumption of the dominant classes in regards to the six counties of 'Northern Ireland' is that economic liberalism goes hand in hand with sustainable peace – in other words, neoliberal social and economic policies plus peace process equals prosperity.

WORDS :
LIAM O' ROURKE

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With its 'propaganda of peace', the media is giving the public an explicit narrative of 'an end to violence' and of a 'political settlement' having been achieved, as well as an implicit narrative according to which Northern Ireland is at present fit 'for integration into the consumerist society and the global economic order'. [1]

The image of Martin McGuinness and Ian Paisley ringing the trading bell of the Nasdaq in December 2007 symbolises the idea that if the 'invisible hand' of the market gets its way, it will provide lasting peace and reconciliation. Economic development agencies from countries like Kosovo and Iraq have even been brought on official visits to the north to witness the success of that idea. Under the 'new dispensation', governance structures have been assembled to reconfigure post-conflict economic space.

'The onset of devolution has promoted a mix between ethno-sectarian resource competition and a constantly expanding neoliberal model of governance.' All governing parties subscribe to the virtues of free market enterprise, austerity finance, urban regeneration, public-private partnership, private-finance initiatives, and foreign direct investment by global multinationals. Neo liberal principles of privatisation, fiscal conservatism and low social welfare are seen as the main engines of social and economic peace dividend. [2] Peace has in effect been 'privatised'.

The Mask of Neoliberalism

In opposition to the destructive antagonism between Republicanism and Unionism, the neoliberal project of governing elites promotes the the 'shared non-sectarian identity' of the consumer.

It seeks to normalise the north by reducing 'shared space' to commercial shared space. Critics point that this idea is fundamentally to 'provide a mask or a 'Potemkin Village' to obscure the poverty and sectarianism hidden behind'. [3] The recently opened Titanic Belfast project is a prime example of such a 'Potemkin Village' promoted by this 'propaganda of peace'. A lecturer in History of Design at the University of Ulster has described the likes of the Titanic Project and the Laganside Development as the city's largest 'normalisation project' and contrasts the 'propaganda drive to make Belfast appear as normal' to the fact that at the same time the population has become even more divided and segregated. [4]

This project of 'rebranding' the six counties is there to hide the fact that Northern Ireland is a failed economic entity. It is fiscally dependent on the rest of the UK ; its annual deficit stands at £9 billion (€10.6 billion) a year, equivalent to £5,000 a person. Public spending accounts to almost 70 percent of its gross domestic product. Economic output is 20 percent below the British average, 30 percent of the population is economically inactive and it continues to experience the lowest private sector productivity of all UK regions. It is the only part of the UK where weekly wages in the public sector –where over 30 percent of the workforce is employed- are on average £105 higher than the private sector.

Growth rates have consistently trailed behind the UK average. All this puts in doubt whether 'Northern Ireland' can become an attractive option never mind a shining example for global capital. According to PricewaterhouseCoopers' Economic Outlook report published in August

2012, not only is the north's economy facing 'very serious problems' and lagging behind the rest of the UK, but the prognosis is even worse, with predictions for the regional economy to shrink even further. [5] Esmond Birnie, an Ulster Unionist and a senior economist at Pricewater-HouseCoopers admitted last year: 'Over three decades, the standard of living has remained flat. The reliance on the public sector still remains very high. We've had a high decline in manufacturing...and while there has been growth in the service sector, these are low wage, low productivity jobs - no compensation for the loss of traditional industries. The Northern Ireland economy only grows when there is a massive increase in public spending and another increase in public spending is not realistic.' [6] So much for Northern Ireland PLC!

"Neoliberal peace has failed to normalise the six counties. Fourteen years after the Belfast Agreement Northern Ireland remains a very divided society."

The Spoils of Peace

There were hopes that the cessation of violence would be followed by a 'peace dividend'. A detailed study of the evolution of the northern economy in the ten years since following the Belfast Agreement seriously questions the degree to which the peace process has engendered a general and sustainable 'peace dividend', especially for the marginalized populations who suffered most during the conflict. [7] Even Ian Coulter, the chairman of the Confederation of British Industry, stated earlier this year that despite the political peace dividend in the last 14 years, there has been no real economic dividend and the north's economy has not moved on since 1998. [8] Her Majesty's Treasury provided this assessment in a paper published last year: 'Peace has not in itself been sufficient to raise Northern Ireland prosperity to the UK average or even to the UK average excluding South East England. Northern Ireland still has one of the weakest economies in the UK.' [9] And since the start of the great recession 'the much-heralded prospects of a peace dividend have simply evaporated following the meltdown of global financial markets. Negative equity, job fears and the cost of living dominate the domestic economic horizon.' [10]

The working class has seen little improvement of their condition. The Wall Street Journal notes that: 'In the decade following the official end of 'the Troubles,' levels of poverty in both communities has not been reduced. Any peace dividend Northern Ireland received has failed to

reach those that most needed to see economic improvement. Indeed, working class communities, which were heavily subsidised by the British state during the Troubles, have actually seen their economic position decline in recent years.' [11] In a 2011 report, the Northern Ireland Assembly's Research and Library Service studied deprivation and social disadvantage since 1998. It found little evidence of 'peace dividend' and that the gap between the well-off and the disadvantaged 'persisted and in some cases increased since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement'. Of the 56 wards ranked as the most deprived ten percent in 2001, the researchers found that only 14 areas had climbed out of deprivation by last year. In some cases this had been achieved only because of boundary changes. [12] It is thus hardly surprising that there were recent criticisms of the fact that working class communities have missed out on the dividend from development at Titanic Quarter. [13]

Divide and Re-Conquer

Behind the facade of regeneration, 'peace' is at best what has been described as 'benign apartheid'. Segregation and divisions have significantly increased since 1998. Neoliberal peace has failed to normalise the six counties. Fourteen years after the Belfast Agreement Northern Ireland remains a very divided society. The indicators show that in some areas the divisions have increased: most obviously, the number of interface walls has increased from twenty two at the time the Agreement was signed to forty eight today according to the Department of Justice, or eighty eight according to the last count taken by the Institute of Conflict Research. There is evidence of continuing deep division in housing and education. [14] With its failure to bring peace dividend or develop reconciliation, the 're-branding' of the six counties is a case of 'putting lipstick on a gorilla.' [15]

The idea that the free market can generate social and economic prosperity and lasting peace can thus be seriously questioned. The current economic crisis makes things even more difficult. Objective circumstances certainly have

weakened the neoliberal project but whether an alternative political project of the subordinated classes will emerge remains very uncertain. The establishment is particularly concerned that the economic crisis provides an opportunity for so-called 'dissident' republicans.

"In opposition to the destructive antagonism between Republicanism and Unionism, the neoliberal project of governing elites promotes the the 'shared non-sectarian identity' of the consumer. It seeks to normalise the north by reducing 'shared space' to commercial shared space."

The Financial Times for example noted that in the Creggan estate in Derry, six out of ten people are were classed as 'economically inactive' and in a sign of the deepening recession over two thousand three hundred people applied for 14 jobs on offer at a new DFS furniture store. The paper concluded that 'this climate has presented opportunities for hard line groups of dissident Republicans, who oppose the peace process'. [16]



Former Tánaiste and attorney general Michael McDowell predicted earlier this year that the peace process will survive the economic downturn on both sides of the border. Politics in the north could become more divisive in the absence of economic progress, but he said he didn't believe there was a fundamental risk that it would slip back into conflict. [17] This raises the important question of the political effects of the economic crisis. There is no automatic connection between an economic and a political crisis. There is an economic crisis, but it has not yet reached the stage of an organic crisis – where the very legitimacy of the system itself is questioned. Instead, in the north the crisis has led to calls to lower corporation taxes. There was a substantial one day strike on 30 November 2011 over public sector pensions but it seems to have had little political effects. Such protests remain limited to 'economic-corporate' interests and are unconnected to the question of winning political power and the transformation of the state.

Different Class

While working class people in the six counties are overwhelmingly aware of the material inequalities that mark the social order under which they live, this seems to have little effect upon the political culture of the province. The ideological formations that are prevalent within the six counties would appear to arise not out of class consciousness but rather out of national and sectarian identity. Over two hundred thousand people are members of a trade union, but class politics are absent and the left is largely irrelevant. [18] Many writers in the socialist and labour traditions have pointed to episodes of working-class unity in the past - notably the 1907 and 1919 strikes and the 1932 unemployed workers' movement as the way forward but have failed to analyse the relative weight of class issues and national or sectarian divisions. Class and 'religion' have together shaped the structure and consciousness of the modern working class in the north of Ireland A purely class-based focus - or rather one based on a narrow economic definition of class - leads to a misinterpretation of such key events. Working-class unity can be fragile if based solely on economic interests, as in 1907, 1919 and 1932. It is unlikely to crystallise into full unity embracing political and ideological elements, given the irreconcilable differences between the Unionist and Nationalist components. [19] The left and other oppositional forces such as dissenting republicans are also all emerging from a period of defeat and the general climate is one of depoliticisation and demobilisation. 'Ours is the age more of the general shrug than the general strike' as Mick Hume put it. [20] The key question is whether these are structural tendencies or a conjunctural phenomenon. From a longue durée perspective - an approach which gives priority to long-term historical structures over the histoire événementielle or short term 'eventual history' — it would be premature to conclude that the working class movement in the north is dead, it is possibly more accurate to characterise it as being in a process between decomposition and recomposition. Key to that recomposition are international factors. Given the dependence of the six counties on external forces (political and economic) the internal balance of forces is unlikely to change in the north until they begin to change elsewhere in the British Isles and in Western Europe. Until then the left will have to prepare for a long 'war of position' and get ready to battle for political leadership.



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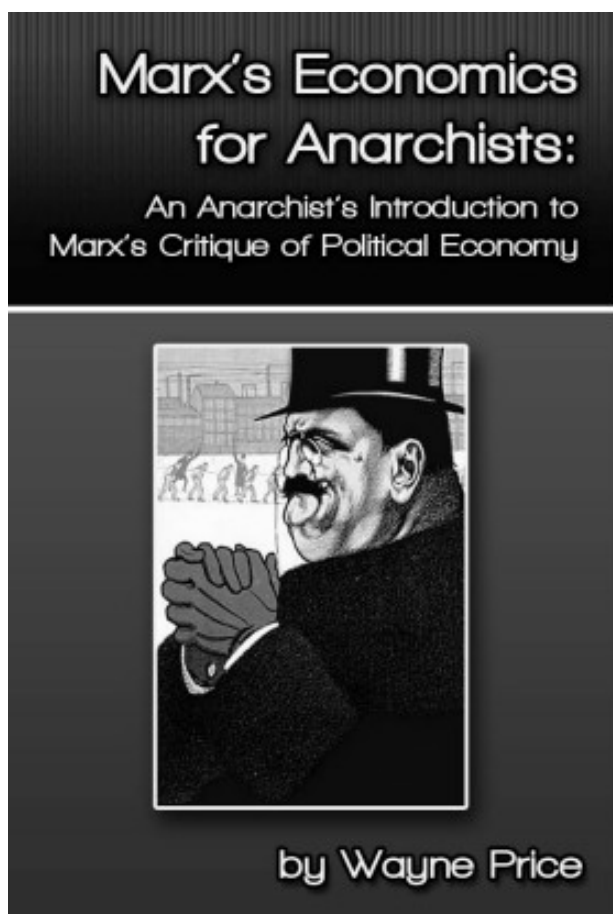
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TOP MARX A REVIEW OF 'MARX'S ECONOMICS FOR ANARCHISTS' BY WAYNE PRICE

WORDS: DERMOT FREEMAN



"The Philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it." Karl Marx

One of the chapters in Wayne Price's invaluable book is entitled 'The Capitalist Epoch of Decline' and it is hard to imagine that we are living in anything else. All of capitalism's men are rushing around attempting to get the wheels back on the cart that is taking us ever-faster to hell. For many people at this stage it has become obvious that putting the wheels back on does nothing for the ultimate destination.

One man put forth an alternate economic theory to capitalism, and that fellow's name was Karl Marx. For some, they exalted him into a deity, for others he's been vilified, but his ideas have been interpreted and re-interpreted, and distilled

for years. For Anarchists, we have a difficult time with Marx which goes all the way back to the First International split of 1872 and continues down a line from the many Leninist parties who interpreted him in many ways up to and including the termination of many anarchists as being 'the right thing to do'.

Wayne Price has attempted in this book to give us a synopsis of what Marx wrote in his three main volumes of *Capital*, and the *Grundrisse*. He is well aware of the difficult relationship Anarchists have with Marx, but it is important to look at the main ideas contained within these works. He is to be welcomed in this as I don't know about you, but I have no intention of ever getting around to reading the 1072 page *Capital* in my brief time on this planet. Read this book instead.

"Marx helps us to understand our enemy, and Wayne Price should be commended for helping us understand him."

Marx himself said a few things which I think we need to remember from the outset. He said 'I am not a Marxist' but he also set out to understand how capitalism worked in order to destroy it. Know thine enemy, as the proverb said.

The author takes us on a tour of the essential ideas of Marx around economic theory. We look at 'alienation' brought about by working for someone else, for profits, along with the nature of value and how we get from value to price. There are interesting ideas around 'fetishism', how owning a product (i-Phone anyone?) can make people feel better about themselves, which appears very prescient by Herr Marx.

Other central ideas which are explained are 'the labour theory of value', 'surplus value', profit, 'the declining rate of profit', and how capitalism enters into cycles from booms to busts. The key part here is that Wayne Price is imparting the central themes that emerge from *Capital* and what we can learn from Marx's work.

There is a joke in this book which goes that "Marxist economists have predicted 20 of the last 5 recessions." As Price puts it, "Marx's critique of political economy is a set of useful theoretical tools for understanding the present conditions of the capitalist economy and its likely future developments." As anarchists who wish to bring about the demise of capitalism we should use these tools as best we can. He gives us a method to understand the processes at work in the heart of capitalism.

"Capitalism has been remarkably adept at being a shape-shifter, which allowed it to continue its rapacious nature..."

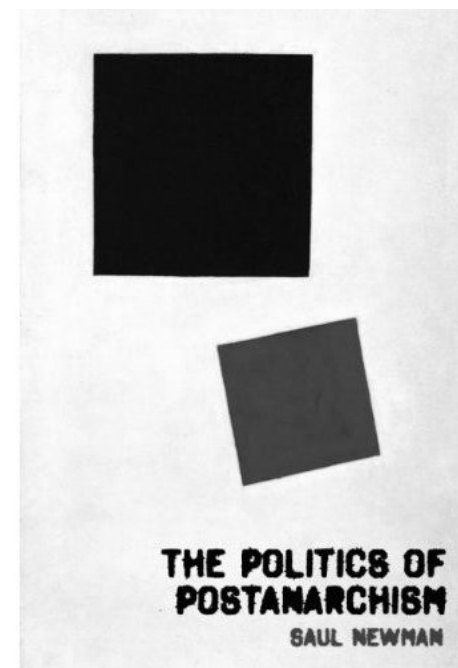
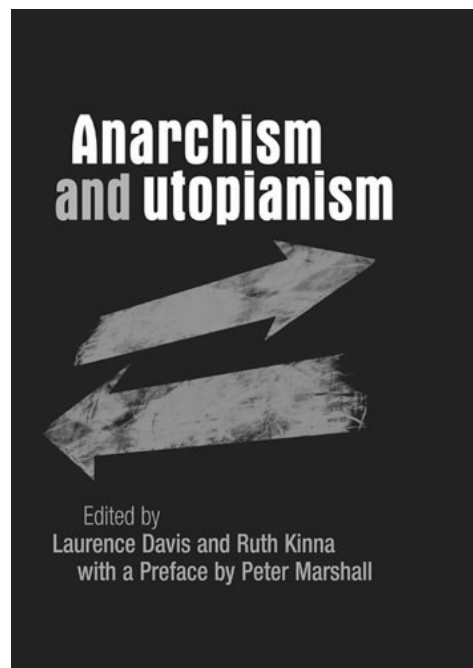
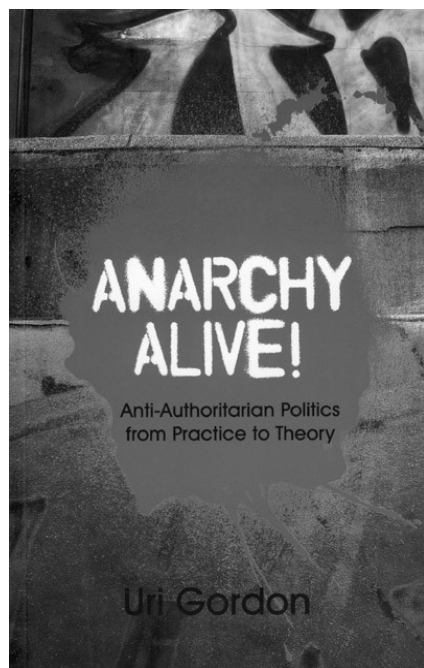
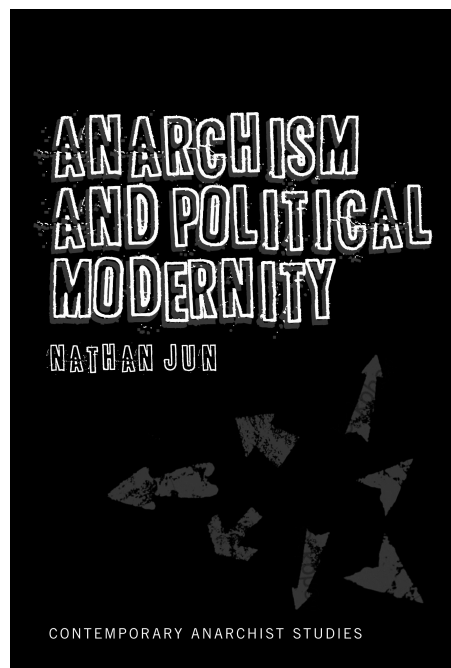
Marx saw capitalism creating the seeds of its own demise, as it would create a strong, super-exploited, organised working class who would destroy the oppressor. That has not necessarily been the case.

Capitalism has been remarkably adept at being a shape-shifter, which allowed it to continue its rapacious nature and increase the level of exploitation and suffering in this world. As Murray Bookchin noted, we are faced with 'anarchism or annihilation' and Wayne Price has given us a chance with this book to equip ourselves with the tools to understand this beast which we fight. It is a fight for survival. Marx wanted something like what happened in the Paris Commune, but his interpretation of what the future could be like was narrow, centralised, and open to corruption. Anarchists know that the State does not 'die out' as Marx and Engels expected. It is something that has to be destroyed. But via its destruction comes the federated mechanisms for direct democracy which will replace it.

Capitalism the great shape-shifter may be in crisis, but it doesn't mean that whatever follows it will be better. Revolutionaries will preach revolution. Capitalism remains the enemy of the working class; it is the enemy of the world which it destroys for its own purposes. Marx helps us to understand our enemy, and Wayne Price should be commended for helping us understand him.



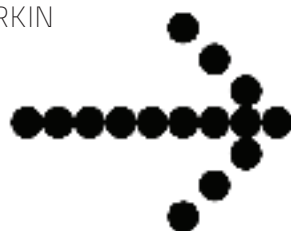
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Title: Marx's Economics for Anarchists
Author: Wayne Price
Publisher: www.zabalaza.net or
www.anarkismo.net
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ANARCHIST STUDIES NETWORK CONFERENCE 2.0: 'MAKING CONNECTIONS'

It's a strange anomaly that anarchism is so marginal an idea in academia despite it being a major influence on contemporary social movement praxis, as well as having been the dominant proletarian ideology worldwide for decades leading up to the Russian Revolution.

WORDS: CATHAL LARKIN
AND LIAM HOUGH



As a framework for radical theorising, it is far less common than both Marxism and oppositional postmodernism (two traditions whose strong points anarchist-communism has the potential to synthesise quite well, by the way). However, there are many signs this is changing. This last decade has seen an explosion in anarchist academic work and the creation of anarchist studies networks based in North America and Britain. One such grouping, the ASN, held a three-day conference this summer in Loughborough, England, that two of the editorial collective were able to attend. There were roughly around 200 people in attendance, mostly from Europe and North America.

The Anarchist Studies Network should be commended for generously subsidising the costs and fees of unemployed and student attendees. At times the programme had up to seven sessions were running simultaneously, so our short feedback here is obviously quite partial, based as it is on what we attended and the general feeling we got from others we spoke with. Also, the scope of the programme was pretty eclectic, with streams themed under anarchism and education, religion, disability, non-domination, anarchism in different national contexts, post-anarchism and art, and bodily anarchy, to name a few.

One highlight was a roundtable discussion with members of various Industrial Workers of the World branches, in particular hearing about recent organising successes by Pizza Hut workers in Sheffield. Two of the best sessions made use of an open slot allocated for spontaneous discussions, workshops and so on. Gabriel Kuhn called a session that has resulted in the creation of an Independent Anarchist Scholars Network. It has started as an email list but it is hoped to grow to be a vibrant network of mutual support for anarchist scholarly work outside of the university.

A much warranted session on feminism (with possibly the highest attendance we witnessed of any billing in the programme) created space to look at the lack of concrete sessions on feminism in the conference programme, and also to discuss the dynamics of the conference overall in terms of what and who was lacking in terms of representation.

There were other related criticisms of the balance of content within the programme – possibly reflective of the general focus of many anarchist academics. While Occupy was discussed a lot, we didn't see many papers relating to the current European austerity agenda, the broader global capitalist crisis and the fight against them. Perhaps it is reflective of a strong post-structuralist influence on contemporary anarchist theorising that the big picture analyses were so rare. With some exceptions, the format of the sessions was of a conventional academic nature, not particularly participatory or inclusive, with the little time given to discussion often thus dominated by those who are more familiar and comfortable in such settings.

While it could be tempting to suggest that the increasing prevalence of anarchist theory and research within academia is something of an inevitability, we shouldn't take it that its course is mapped out by any means. We would hope that such a development would not reproduce some of the pitfalls of academic theorising in its detachment from wider society and general depoliticisation, but would build on the many existing links that are there, in and outside of universities, with real social movements. Overall, we saw much potential in this event to strengthen such links (and met a bunch of great people).



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CHAVS: THE DEMONISATION OF THE WORKING CLASS by Owen Jones

WORDS: LIAM HOUGH

Released in Summer 2011 and now in its second edition, *Chavs* is Owen Jones' attempt to help rescussitate debate around class within mainstream political discourse.

Broadly speaking, it is focused on the fate of working class communities in Britain since the Thatcher era and the disappearance of working class political representation, and puts forward some possible ideas to envision a renewed class politics for today. The book has proven a popular one and has propelled its author's public status as a prominent left-wing commentator, and one of the main voices of initiatives to reclaim the Labour Party as a working class organisation.

As Jones is quick to point out in the preface to the new edition, had it been released a couple of years earlier, when class denial was still a more viable ideological line, then *Chavs* would likely have remained a more obscure work. But, given its convergence with the current crisis and the riots that spread throughout various British cities last August, *Chavs* arrived on the market at a time when issues of wealth and power have become far more pressing to a wider public. That said, no matter how many new billionaires this crisis has managed to create, the author

CHAVS

THE DEMONIZATION OF THE WORKING CLASS



'Superb and angry' Guardian
'Eloquent and impassioned' Evening Standard

OWEN JONES

"The core myths on which this 'middle Britain' consensus is based are that 'we are all middle class now', that class is an outdated concept and that social problems can be explained as the moral or even genetic failings of individuals or families."

is well aware that much of society's frustrations can still more easily be channelled against 'welfare dependents', as it can against powerful elites.

The book offers a thorough mapping of how the neoliberal project has taken shape in Britain. It documents the shifts in social structure brought about by the steep decline of traditional industries and with them, trade unions, the corresponding rise of the service industries and the increasing dominance of the financial sector. These are related to changes in popular cultural and political discourse, centred on the mantras of individual aspiration and personal responsibility, showing how the forms of exclusion and inequality that are the effects of deindustrialisation and the chasm it left behind are today explained in terms of their 'anti-social' symptoms. One familiar example: if people are unemployed, it's because they're too lazy to get a job, not because of the lack of jobs.

It is a credit to the author that he's managed to cover so much material in a style that is clear and easy to read, incorporating a broad stock of secondary research to support his own case studies on the media, the party system, changes in occupation and the emergence of the 'flexible' workforce, education and cultural capital, the post-welfare vacuum, and the rise of far-right politics. Indeed, every chapter could be read in its own right as a primer on class in each of these areas of society.

'Middle Britain'

The title, *Chavs*, was chosen because, according to Jones, it encapsulates the kind of class disdain that has become totally acceptable in much of British culture over the last 30 years. In a culture increasingly more dominated by middle-class ideals, the world 'below' this norm is framed as one of feckless single-mothers, hoodied teenagers and welfare dependants, living undisciplined lives on council estates and in high-rise tower blocks.

The core myths on which this 'middle Britain' consensus is based are that 'we are all middle-class now', that class is an outdated concept and that social problems can be explained as the moral or even genetic failings of individuals or families. To understand how these ideas have become so normalised, it is necessary to see them as a symptom of the broader social changes that have taken place in Britain since the 1970's and how the ideals of the welfare state have been supplanted by free-market individualism.

Jones develops his argument by first leading the reader through an analysis of the media, examining the ideological role it plays in imprinting the myth that most people now live cosy middle-class lives except for 'a problematic 'chav rump' left on the wrong side of history.' It is a clever way to open up the study, as it builds on the most familiar of images and narratives we are fed today, situating media production and consumption in a wider context, and illustrating the political function of such representations. His analysis of popular culture covers everything from the relative absence of plausible working class characters on television, to the gross marketisation of English football as a global brand, that has ultimately excluded a whole swath of supporters who can no longer afford to go see their local team.

Farewell to the Working Class?

Probably the most substantial and valuable sections of the book try to answer the question of just who is the working class today. Jones is well aware that the working class could never be defined as homogeneous, that there 'have always been different groups within it, not all of whom have sat comfortably together'. Taking a definition of working class in both material terms of having to sell one's labour on the market, with little autonomy over this labour, and also in cultural terms as something that shapes one's identity, sense of history, place, language, shared experience and expectations of life, Jones attempts to give a sketch of today's working conditions and the shape of communities that were once centred around the factory, the mine or the docks. What we find is a fragmented class certainly no more homogeneous than at other phases in recent history, yet whose interests can still be broadly defined as antagonistic to those of a small minority who benefit most off their labour – waged or otherwise.

Though he doesn't reduce an understanding of class to simply income levels, income is obviously a key factor, and statistically, the median

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"Even where the state still provides some semblance of social support for citizens, it is often on terms that are more favourable to capital."

household-income in Britain is £21, 000 – already a drastically lower figure than one might expect from the elusive ideal of 'middle Britain'.

While necessary attention is given to the fact that 8 million people are still employed in some form of manual occupation, Jones does not dispute the relative disappearance of traditional industrial occupations and the rootedness that went with them. The real dramatic figures are to be found in the number of people employed in service sector work, predominantly in retail, call-centres and public services where a further 8 million people are now employed.

This economy is one of a very different character to that on which the dominant images of the 'traditional' working class are based. For starters, women now make up a huge share of the wage-labour market. Also, most of the gains of the labour movement have been pulled from under these workers. Many are employed on 'temp' contracts, often through agencies, or on a part-time basis and are non-unionised, all of which contribute to greater precarity in terms of workplace rights and overall social security.

Jones looks at the conditions in which most service sector work is done, their authoritarian style of management and regimentation and, in particular, the effects on the health of call centre workers and increasing stress levels on workers generally, induced by the simultaneous extension and fragmentation of the working day. These issues are approached from the point of view of not only needing to understand contemporary working conditions, but to specifically highlight the particular forms of alienation and exploitation that even the cleanest and less physically arduous jobs entail, and what prospects they present in terms of workers getting organised.

Taking Stock

One of his conclusions on these issues is that a 'blue-uniformed male factory worker with a union card in his pocket might have been an appropriate symbol for the working class of the 1950s. A low-paid, part-time, female shelf-stacker would certainly not be unrepresentative of the same class today'. To help construct a more formidable class politics, the left itself needs to look at how its own romanticisation of the former plays into its irrelevance in the eyes

of the latter.

The remainder of these sections of Jones's investigation draws out the hypocrisy of the language of 'meritocracy' that has been used to rationalise increasing inequality in Britain. The basic strategy of this ideology is one that denies any kind of structural analysis in favour of moralising about the personal responsibilities of individuals. Social problems are explained at the level of the individual - their lack of discipline or enterprise - while more social resources such as healthcare and education are opened up to commodification.

Capitalism's major victory over the last three decades has been to dismantle labour's power in the West through many of the processes mentioned above, and with the major growth of financial capitalism and wage repression, to proliferate easy credit and mortgage schemes that have lumped unseemly amounts of debt on to

In the section entitled, 'A Rigged Society', Jones also illustrates not only the economic boundaries that underlie a society rationalised in terms of individual merit, but also how cultural, habitual tendencies debar many working class people from even considering that they might enter into educational institutions or pursue certain career paths. In this discussion of the cultural and social capital of the middle classes, Jones shows the processes that go far beyond economic understandings about formal equality of access to institutions. He shows the subtlety of how class is reproduced through the maintenance of spaces of privilege which many people of a lower socio-economic position or sense of status would not conceive of stepping into. These tendencies are not something that the social circles of left-wing politics are exempt of. They should inform our understandings of privilege within our own movements and questions over who can participate and who gets to define the problems and "solutions" for oppressed social groups.



individual households. The few benefits gained at the level of production (or service provision) are recuperated at the level of consumption – and this in a society where you are now expected to consume education, consume healthcare and so on.

Even where the state still provides some semblance of social support for citizens, it is often on terms that are more favourable to capital, for example, in supplementing private landlords through housing benefit while effectively going on strike in terms of building council housing. Indeed, many of the most poverty-stricken households covered in Jones's study are those who bought into the 'right-to-buy' schemes first rolled out under Thatcher, which helped set the tone for the continuing privatisation of council housing today.

Dark Days

Another chapter focuses on the rise of the far-right in Britain, particularly in the shape of the British National Party's electoral successes in former Labour-dominated constituencies. Jones argues that it is the material issues of scarce affordable housing and secure employment that have provided the root conditions for this reactionary turn, and that discussion of the racism that the BNP thrives off must be framed within this context. The BNP have thrived by racialising these issues – in the context of a broader, liberal multicultural discourse that ignores class – presenting themselves as the voice of the "white minority".

One missed opportunity of this chapter is that, ironically, it is pretty much told from the per-

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spective of the majority-white people who have witnessed the failures of New Labour and the welfare state and the fragmentation of their communities, but doesn't engage us with the views of those minorities who are the actual targets of far-right groups or the populist discourses around Islamophobia and 'the immigrant infestation'. This absence gives too much primacy to the class issue in this case and doesn't let us consider the complexity of racism and its intersection with other forms of oppression.

Chavs is a densely-packed book, but not an impenetrable read. There is barely the space here to point out half of the book's strengths, let alone take issue with it in any substantial way. This review is mostly focused on relaying the primary economic changes that are documented in the book, and the analysis of the BNP's rising popularity, only a few fragments of the overall picture offered. As the author has stated, it is meant as a contribution towards encouraging real debate around class and to promote left-wing ideas while the left is dramatically weak. I think this is what it should be taken up as, ideally as a step towards a more prominent focus on class and class struggle, and not as *the* book to understand the whole issue.

Beyond the State

For those who don't see the route for emancipatory political projects in claiming state power, under any banner, there are issues with this work which should be taken up critically. (Though there is little sense in stringently arguing that this or that remains under-theorised, as the book is not meant as a theoretical work.) In this context, it is best to flag up some of the assumptions or partialities of Jones's position.

While rightly seeing New Labour and Blairism as symptomatic of the dominance of free-market politics on a scale far wider than Britain, Jones's treatment of the Labour Party pitches them as an organisation that has otherwise consistently represented working class interests until their degeneration into New Labour. Historically, this can be challenged both in terms of internal and external policy. Although the traditional class alliances nationally of the Tories and Labour in the 20th Century are illustrated in one chapter, the main timeline of the book stretches from the 1970's to the present day. The role of the state itself is not scrutinised in *Chavs* beyond showing how it has been used to administer the 'Thatcherite agenda', and should be reclaimed for working class interests. While not romanticising the days of the welfare state, we are not given much critical discussion of such models in the context of the broader historical and geographical development of capitalism, past, present or future. This makes it difficult to grasp what social ideal Jones would advocate in terms of the goal for present-day movements of an internationalist perspective. The book's focus is confined to the island of Britain, though the fact that Northern Ireland doesn't feature is as much reflective of the very contradictions of the British state's territories, as any flaw in the validity of looking at the social and economic processes that have taken place in England, Scotland and Wales over the last three

decades. The political history of Northern Ireland is only one site among countless others that can offer arguments for why the very existence of states should be challenged – for reasons that the Labour Party are not exempt of. The narrative of the breakdown of the welfare state is also one where, entwined with the gains of feminist movements, women become more visible in terms of their accommodation within the waged-labour system. On this, it is important that it is not just inclusion in the labour market that influences some crude understanding of women as paid-up members of the class struggle within the left. Capitalism has required a sexual division of labour that has confined women to the private sphere of reproduction – a role that has been legitimised as natural or voluntary – providing the system with its most crucial commodity, a workforce. We need to be vigilant in order that the invisible phases in this history should feature equally as accounts of working class experience and shape our theory and praxis. Without doing so, our attempts to prefigure a society that can transcend capital and the state's divisions will always be partial.

Overall, *Chavs* gives us a tangible insight to the dynamics of class decomposition since the 1970's. Jones offers compelling evidence of the need for an organised opposition to the particular conditions that neoliberalism has established. He has shown the degrees of atomisation, thwarted aspiration and disillusionment that have developed in Britain, which make cohesive forms of class solidarity seem all the more elusive. It is a sincere work that poses many practical questions around the issue of class politics today, ideas it would seem will have some real currency to the left of Ed Milliband's "one nation" Labour approach.

For those who want to see class shed its status in the popular imagination as an idea of the past and to construct a revolutionary politics for today, the task should be to see that those most effected by these conditions are the ones setting the terms of any such debate and struggle. For that, we need to look to where the foundation for such forms of solidarity and resistance already exist, and build from there.



For further discussion on the politics of 'chav' hatred, see: badreputation.org.uk/2011/08/30/is-chav-a-feminist-issue/ and ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/beautiful-transgressions-8/ For analysis of similar issues to those addressed by Jones, but in an Irish context, check out: rabble.ie/2011/09/30/media-rte-scum

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It only makes sense to seek out and identify structures of authority, hierarchy and domination in every aspect of life, and to challenge them; unless a justification for them can be given, they are illegitimate, and should be dismantled, to increase the scope for human freedom.